



# Religion Culture Society

## 5



MTA-SZTE

RESEARCH GROUP FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIOUS CULTURE

RELIGION, CULTURE, SOCIETY

Yearbook of the MTA-SZTE Research Group  
for the Study of Religious Culture  
Szeged, Hungary



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Edited by  
Gábor BARNA and Orsolya GYÖNGYÖSSY



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## FOREWORD

You have in your hands the last yearbook of the MTA-SZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture. For five plus one years, that is, for six years we enjoyed the support of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. However, because of the personnel conditions we were unable to submit an application for a further research period.

As we take our leave it is worth briefly recalling our research plans and the results achieved. Our research aim can be summed up as a comparative process analysis of the changes and renewal of 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century Hungarian religious culture (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, neo-pagan), applying methods of cultural ethnology and anthropology.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterised first by the intertwining of the church and state institutional systems, then by their confrontation, and finally their separation, following the changing political and ideological regimes. Parallel with this the relations between the denominations and towards the state also underwent a transformation, new religious movements appeared, and the focal points of spirituality shifted.

The Christian world-view and values were increasingly pushed into the background. This was also manifested in the religious, cultural, individual and collective rites of weekdays and feast days and their changes over the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time the role of religion acquired greater importance among the Hungarian groups who found themselves in minority status with the Trianon peace/dictate ending the First World War that awarded large Hungarian territories to the neighbouring countries. There the traditional Christian churches play a role in preserving identity. Socialism imposed restrictions on the Christian world-view. Our research group studied many documents on the persecution of small Christian communities in the archive of the communist state security services. A generational fracture occurred in the transmission of world-view and values, creating the need to research the relationship between religion, church and youth, between modernisation and Christianity.

The role of women in society increased from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their place in religious life also changed. Greater emphasis was placed on general culture and child-raising within the family, the role of mothers, relations between the genders and the institution of marriage came to be seen in a new light. With the rising level of literacy new genres appeared: prayer books published specifically for women and children.

Today's "secularizing", "laicizing" and "mediatizing" global mass culture appears in Hungarian contemporary religiosity, also at the virtual level. The role, forms and rites of real and virtual (small) communities have increased in importance. Denominational schools ceased to exist when they were nationalised in 1948. Their relaunching after 1990 was related to the political changes and defi-

ned a new role for church schools in contemporary religious and social life. The intellectual leaders of religious communities (priest, teacher, cantor) have always played a role as models, and transmitted religious, cultural and scientific knowledge and moral values. As a result of the social changes in the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries their role in public life had increasingly diminished.

Secular and religious values now coexist. The institutionalised churches and the practice of religion have fallen into the background, but the demand for spirituality has not. The role of religion is important, especially in creating the historical sense of identity, but it is not the sole factor in shaping values. Christian values have always been represented by the blessed and the saints. In this way the 20<sup>th</sup> century canonizations of blessed and saints can be the expressions of social aspirations specific to the time. Because of the persecution of churches and religion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there are many martyrs.

The new religious movements that are appearing have made the technical achievements of modernisation an integral part of their tool set. In the relationship between modernisation and Christianity, elements of popular culture appear within the frames of vernacular religion. Use of the new means of communication (internet), and of light music for religious purposes characterises mainly the religiosity of young people. But they also play an important part in the Catholic charismatic revival and in the explosive spread of the Pentecostal charismatic movement.

With the demand for the mystic, and as a consequence of migration caused by globalisation, various individual, esoteric forms of religiosity, the Eastern religions (especially Islam), and the neo-pagan movements have taken root in Hungary. The two decades since the change of regime in the 1990s have reshaped Hungary's cultural and religious palette and launched a variety of processes for the reconstruction of identity. The phenomenon of contemporary neo-pagan-Christian religious syncretism has religious, cultural and political dimensions.

The spread of Islam in Hungary (Europe) is influencing Christian religious practice, but Islam too is undergoing transformation in the (Hungarian) European cultural and political space. Under the influence of the changes, Christian denominations are drawing closer together within the ecumenical movement. An interdenominational dialogue has also begun between the non-Christian religions present in our society and the traditional Christian denominations, behind which we find the growing number of mixed (Christian-Muslim) marriages. The resulting integrational/disintegrational influence is not yet a source of social conflicts in Hungary (in the Carpathian Basin), in contrast with countries further to the west, although its influence is substantial.

We are convinced that our researches have given suitable answers to timely questions. We have achieved a great deal. But the changes in society are generating ever newer problems and in response our researchers need to propose research programs related to the three world religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam). I believe that the case studies in this volume clearly reflect this denomina-

tional attachment, as well as the methodological diversity and many-sided approach to religious phenomena.

For years support from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences ensured congenial working conditions and research opportunities for young researchers in the Szeged workshop for the study of religious culture. My associates and the so-called sending researchers rewarded this support with innovative research topics, systematic self-training, PhD dissertations and the publication of a whole series of books and studies. Over recent years they have become integrated into the institutional frames of Hungarian and international academic life and regularly present papers in Hungarian and foreign languages on their research topics. And they are also present on the various forums for the dissemination of knowledge.

Szeged, Christmastide 2018

Gábor BARNA  
editor



## VALUE RESEARCH AMONG HUNGARIAN GYPSY/ROMA PEOPLE WITH A FOCUS ON RESPONSIBILITY IN A RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

**Abstract:** The intention of this paper is to demonstrate that the notion and feeling of responsibility are present both among Hungarians towards the Gypsy/Roma minority of the country and also among the Gypsies towards their own life and communities. Proving this point, the paper relies on the research conducted in the Network of Church-run Roma Special Colleges (NoCRoSC) established by the so-called historical Christian churches on the one hand and in the Gypsy Evangelical Movement (GEM) on the other. The paper presents the updated results on the value system of NoCRoSC students and a detailed discussion on the survey conducted among the members of Hungarian GEM. It also proposes a comprehensive research on Gypsy/Roma values in 4-5 villages in the Eastern part of Hungary.

**Keywords:** Gypsy/Roma people, religiosity, value system, responsibility, Network of Church-run Roma Special Colleges, Gypsy Evangelical movement

Today the realization of “freedom” and “responsibility” in a “socialist democracy” as envisioned by Polányi in *The Great Transformation* (1944) might seem even less realistic than in his time.<sup>1</sup> The so-called existing socialism experienced within the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union lacked both freedom and the acceptance of responsibility, and the same is true of the harsh realities of global capitalism following the collapse of Communism. While theoretically these two values have remained as important as ever (Morel 1986), their actual significance – especially that of responsibility *for* and *among* the Gypsy/Roma<sup>2</sup> population – is questionable and loaded with prejudices.

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1 The first version of this paper was presented at the First Conference of the Visegrád Anthropologists' Network (V4 Net) at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology Halle/Saale, Germany on June 7-9, 2018. The topic of the conference was based on Polányi's above-mentioned vision. I am grateful to the Max Planck Institute, especially Chris Hann for making possible participation in the conference, and also to Bertalan Pusztai and Margit Feischmidt for their comments on my paper.

2 The term *Romani* is used by several political organisations—including the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the US Library of Congress in referring to the ethnic group who trace their origin to the Indian Subcontinent. They are widely dispersed throughout Europe, with their largest concentrated populations in Spain and Romania. Recently, they have also immigrated to the Americas (USA and Brazil) and, to a lesser extent, to North Africa and the Middle East. For self-designation, the term *Roma* is also common in Central and Eastern Europe. The Romani people are also known by a variety of other names, in English as *Gypsies* and *Roma*. While the term *Gypsy* is considered by some in Hungary as degrading, others point out proudly that they are not *Roma*, but *Gypsies*. Consequently, I will use both terms in the present study.



The present study examines responsibility as it is manifested in religious circumstances. The religious framework of this investigation is given for two reasons. The first is that reflecting on the economically, socially, and culturally dire situation of the Roma/Gypsy people in Hungary<sup>3</sup>, the three traditional Christian churches<sup>4</sup> decided to work out what they called the Christian alternative for Roma integration.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the Network of Church-run Roma Special Colleges (NoCRoSC) was established on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2011. In other words, responsibility *for* the Roma population is not simply a social question; it is also a religious issue.

The other reason for investigating responsibility in a religious context is that the so-called Gypsy/Roma awakening or missionary movement<sup>6</sup> has produced considerable results, especially with regard to the changes in the life-style of the converts. In other words, as we will see, responsibility *among* the Roma people for themselves can also be observed.

The study first introduces very briefly both the Network of Church-run Roma Special Colleges and the Gypsy/Roma missionary movement. A short description of the research conducted both in the colleges and the movement is included. It is followed by the presentation of religious characteristics of people participating in them. Finally, their opinion on various aspects of responsibility is highlighted. The study concludes with some suggestions for further research.

### **The Network of Church-run Roma Special Colleges<sup>7</sup>**

The network loosely connects the ecclesiastical institutions that took up the task of providing board for Roma/Gypsy youth who successfully passed the entrance examination and were accepted in the system of Hungarian higher education. The Network of Church-run Roma Special Colleges has a rotating directorate, and regular meetings are held to exchange information and share good practices, while the autonomy and independence of the participating institutions are safeguarded. The inner life of the colleges is arranged separately; and their organisational structure is decided without any external influence. The only requirement is that three modules must be present in their curricula. These modules are the spiritual module, a Hungarian-Romani integration-builder module, and the preparation for public role module.

The colleges provide the students with different services in accordance with the three basic modules. Regarding educational support, for example, they provide tutoring by university professors and preparation for language exams. The intention of NoCRoSC is the integration of Roma/Gypsy students into Hungarian

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3 See, for instance, Kemény, Janky and Lengyel (2004), Kertesi (2005), and Kállai and Törzsök (2006).

4 They are the Catholic, the Reformed and the Lutheran churches.

5 In April 2011, the Hungarian government, as holder of the presidency of the European Union, launched a highly acclaimed Roma strategy.

6 Gyetvai and Rajki (2014: 12) note that in the Anglo-Saxon literature the same phenomenon is called synonymously Gypsy or Romani/Romany evangelical/ Pentecostal, revival movement while in Hungary it is simply and frequently referred as Roma/Gypsy mission.

7 The description of NoCRoSC and the research conducted among its students is from Török (2013).

society. While this necessarily means the improvement of their Hungarian identity, the colleges also want to strengthen the students' Roma identity. What is more, they want the students to develop and firmly establish a *positive* Roma identity. For this purpose, Romani culture is taught extensively. Not surprisingly, a solid Christian worldview is also one of the aims of the founders. They also expect the students to prepare for an active public role, initiating public dialogue and taking up public responsibilities. The final goal, however, is to orient graduated students back to their original community; they are encouraged and helped to maintain connections with their family and original community.

Besides the three-module curricula, there is one more common feature in these colleges. According to the regulations of the network, colleges can accept non-Roma/Gypsy Hungarian students as well, in order to facilitate common living, but the proportion of these students must not exceed 25 percent. With the exception of one college where there are only Roma/Gypsy students, all the others accept non-Roma/Gypsy students as well (Forray & Marton, 2012).

### **The Gypsy/Roma Missionary Movement**

Formal missionary activity directed towards the Gypsies began in earnest worldwide only at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>8</sup> The current movement, present also in Hungary, however, began only in the mid-twentieth century in France. Although the Hungarian missionary movement began to flourish after 1990, its roots go back to the 1970s. The leadership of the Kádár regime had to realize that whatever the Communist propaganda said, marginalized groups<sup>9</sup> existed in the country. The leaders of the party reasoned that it was better to let the Gypsies convert to Christianity, mostly to the Pentecostal Church<sup>10</sup> than to let them remain excluded. As Imre Miklós, the leader of the State Office for Church Affairs put it, it was better if the Gypsies went to a church and remained sober than becoming drunk in a pub. Thus, we might say that the beginning of this movement was supervised by and under the patronage of the Hungarian Communists.

At present, "the number of active Roma Christians is over 200,000 in Spain, over 140,000 in France, tens of thousands in Bulgaria and Romania, and thousands in places like Slovakia and Hungary".<sup>11</sup> There are several characteristic features that differentiate the current movement from earlier missionary activities. First of all, it is almost global while the earlier ones were at most local initiatives, they did not even reach social dimensions. The number of Roma converts is very high, much larger than in earlier times. What is more, these converted Gypsies

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<sup>8</sup> For the history of the Gypsy missionary movement see, e.g. Gyetvai – Rajki (2014) or Wachsmuth (2017).

<sup>9</sup> Apart from the Gypsies, groups of deviant youth were the most obvious examples.

<sup>10</sup> It was controlled by the Communists using every possible means; in other words, it did not represent extra danger for the authorities.

<sup>11</sup> The quotation is from Wachsmuth (2017: 10), but Gellért Gyetvai researching the Roma/Gypsy missionary movement in Hungary estimated the number of Gypsies participating in the revival movement to be around 20,000.

establish not only their own congregations within a denomination, but also independent and autonomous denominations. At last, but not least, the current movement has a strongly ethnic character; it remains within the Roma population and does not reach the members of the host society.

### **Researches in NoCRoSC and the Gypsy/Roma missionary movement**

Researchers of the Institute of Mental Health at Semmelweis University in Hungary conducted a tripartite research among the students of NoCRoSC. It consisted of life-story reviews and surveying both their value system and their network. For the life-story reviews students were asked to narrate their life focusing on questions such as how they achieved or arrived in their current position, who helped them, what their identity was, etc.<sup>12</sup> Referring to the possibility that they would be examples, ideals, and role models for other Roma/Gypsy children and young people,<sup>13</sup> they were also asked what they think of that. On average, the life-interviews lasted about three hours.

The examination of the students' personal network was carried out through the so-called contact diary method (Husztai, Dávid & Vajda, 2013). Students were asked to keep a diary for a week, recording each evening in the entries the names of the persons – with pseudonyms – their gender, and the relationship between them. A contact should not be limited to greeting somebody, but required at least a five-minute discussion either in person or by some other form of communication, such as telephone, Skype, internet, etc.

For the measurement of the students' value system, an adapted version of the European Value Studies (EVS) questionnaire was used.<sup>14</sup> While the proceedings of the survey employ interviewers, the adapted version is self-administered, which was made possible by the instructions of the modified questionnaire. Students are asked to fill in the questionnaire on their own, but if they still had questions they could turn to the researchers on the spot. The adapted version was first essentially the same as the questionnaire of the EVS. However, it soon became clear that there are several items in the EVS questionnaire which are either not applicable to or not conceivable for the students, therefore, a shorter version of the survey is employed, omitting the items considered unnecessary. Nevertheless, apart from demographic data even this shortened version of the questionnaire covers such

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12 For similar interviews, see Forray (2004) and Pusztai (2004). The latter notes that religious communities have not only an integrative effect, they also help educational mobility.

13 Students of the special Roma college in Miskolc, run by the Greek Catholic Church, were taken to the elementary school of a nearby village with a dominantly Roma/Gypsy population. The school-children were informed only about the visit of university students, but the students' Roma/Gypsy identity remained hidden. When they entered the classroom, the Roma/Gypsy children could not help expressing their astonishment, which even intensified when the students told them that they would become lawyers, information specialists, etc.

14 From the numerous publications reporting general, continent-wide results of the EVS, see, for example, Halman, Sieben and Zundert (2011), or for the study on Hungarian values, see Rosta and Tomka (2010).

topics as views on democracy, work, marriage, family, religion, trust in others and in particular institutions, child-raising issues, social responsibilities, identity, regionalism, moral questions, etc.

While certain aspects or some local manifestations of the Hungarian Roma/Gypsy missionary movement were studied by several researchers in the qualitative genre (Péceli – Lukács 2009, Péceli 2013, Péterfi – Szűcs 2014), a survey research was done by Gellért Gyetvai<sup>15</sup>. Systematic one-step random sampling of 1100 members of 51 congregations in the Gypsy/Roma missionary movement resulted in 705 analysable questionnaires representing the active Gypsy membership who were baptized, had a self-reportedly Gypsy/Roma identity, and who were older than 16.

The following analysis is based on the collected data of the above-mentioned two researches.<sup>16</sup>

### **General and Religious Characteristics of Students in NoCRoSC**

The number of students in the five church-run colleges has increased since 2012 (from 104 to 132). Most are between the age of 19 and 23; somewhat more than half (53 percent) are female. Similarly, more than half are from small settlements with a population of less than 5,000. The majority of parents – 80 percent – are of Gypsy/Roma origins; and more than half of the parents have only elementary education. In most cases, the fathers are more educated than the mothers, with the exception of those who have a college or university degree where the proportion of mothers is almost twice as high as that of the fathers (13 % vs 7%). The majority of the students come from 4-5-person households, i.e. they have one or two siblings. The relatives of the students are significantly less educated than their other acquaintances, furthermore, the majority of relatives are economically inactive: unemployed (16 percent), disabled pensioner (23 percent), semiskilled (15 percent).

87 percent consider themselves religious, which is definitely higher than the national average (56.4 percent).<sup>17</sup> The non-religious 13 percent might be surprising in view of the fact that we are talking about Christian colleges, but the churches apparently do not request religious affiliation when they select the students. Nine out of ten students (93 %) belong to a denomination. Regarding the content

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15 If not stated otherwise, information on the research is from the dissertation of my doctoral student, Gellért Gyetvai (2018).

16 Thus, the present study is – for practical purposes – a second, or particularly focused analysis of the original datasets.

17 Here I have to rely on the EVS survey instead of the national census of 2011. In the census it was not obligatory to answer the questions probing religious affiliation and ethnic identity. Thus, 27.2 percent of the Hungarian population did not answer the questions about religiosity. Furthermore, many experts doubt the reliability of the census data, because the formulation of the question on religious affiliation was not unequivocal. It asked whether the respondent was a member of a religious community, which could be interpreted as membership in a small group (community) within a religious denomination.

of their belief system, in comparison with the Hungarian averages as Table 1 indicates, the students of these colleges are definitely much more religious than their peers. The data also indicates that, similarly to their Hungarian peers, the meaning system of their beliefs is not consistent, or at least, it is not in accordance with the basic tenets of Christianity. For belief in reincarnation or the power of amulets is definitely contrary to what Christians should believe.

Table 1. *Some elements of the belief system of NoCRoSC students and the Hungarian population*

Believes in ...	NoCRoSC (%)	Hungarians (%)
God	94***	72
Life after death	80***	35
Hell	73***	26
Heaven	83***	36
Sin	82***	53
Reincarnation	26	22
Amulet, etc.	21	20

Data source for Hungarian population: EVS 2008. The EVS data is filtered to the age group of the NoCRoSC students.

\*\*\* Significance level: 0.001

A similarly higher religious attitude can also be observed in their opinion on the necessity of religious services or rituals at different milestone events, especially at marriage and death (Table 2).

Table 2. *The proportion of NoCRoSC students and Hungarians who consider religious services necessary at different events.*

Religious rituals are important at ...	NoCRoSC (%)	Hungarians (%)
Birth	82**	74
Marriage	96***	72
Death	93***	80

Data source for Hungarian population: EVS 2008. The EVS data is filtered to the age group of the NoCRoSC students

\*\* Significance level: 0.01

\*\*\* Significance level: 0.001

While the students of the special Christian Roma colleges can be considered religious persons who feel the need for religious rituals at the important events in their life, this religiousness is less evident in their participation in religious services. Nevertheless, their data still indicates a significantly higher participation rate than that of their Hungarian counterparts among those who visit churches more regularly, i.e. at least monthly (Table 3). Consequently, the proportion of students who never go to a church is much lower. All of these might be explained by the fact that we are talking about students who received board in colleges run by the traditional Christian churches of Hungary.

**Table 3.** *The proportion of NoCRoSC students and Hungarians participating in the events of organised religion*

	NoCRoSC (%)	Hungarians (%)
<b>Weekly</b>	41***	9
<b>Monthly</b>	22***	7
<b>At certain feasts</b>	17	21
<b>Yearly</b>	9	5
<b>Rarely</b>	14	14
<b>Never</b>	7***	44

Data source for Hungarian population: EVS 2008. The EVS data is filtered to the age group of the NoCRoSC students

\*\*\* Significance level: 0.001

Significant differences can be observed between the students' and the Hungarians' views on the areas where the churches might be able to give competent answers and solutions (Table 4). While the differences – with the exception of spirituality – are significant even at the level of 0.001, it is nevertheless noteworthy that these students consider the churches capable of providing feasible answers both to the social problems and the difficulties of family life. Possible explanations for this high confidence include again the fact that these students are religious and living in church-run colleges where they can learn about the teachings of the Christian churches on both social issues and family life in the spiritual modules of NoCRoSC.

**Table 4:** *The proportion of NoCRoSC students and Hungarians who think that the churches can give appropriate answers to different problems*

	NoCRoSC (%)	Hungarians (%)
<b>Moral</b>	59***	41
<b>Family</b>	63***	34
<b>Spiritual</b>	78**	61
<b>Social</b>	53***	19

Data source for Hungarian population: EVS 2008 The EVS data is filtered to the age group of the NoCRoSC students

\*\* Significance level: 0.01

\*\*\* Significance level: 0.001

### The Opinion of Students in NoCRoSC on Responsibility

The EVS offers several possibilities to examine the views on accepting responsibility. One area is the attitude towards work; another is the position on parent-child duties, including the values that parents should teach to their children. Finally, the frequency of membership in different civil organizations and voluntary work as indicators of fulfilling social responsibilities can also be tested.

As we can see in Table 5, the students' attitude towards work differs significantly from that of their non-Gypsy counterparts. Work is not always in first place, especially not if it means less free time. In comparison, these students are less likely to find it humiliating to receive money without working for it. Similarly, they do not regard work as necessary for self-realisation or development. All in all, while they consider work as an important component of their life, their attitude towards it differs significantly from that of their non-Gypsy peers. It does not occupy such a central and dominant place in their life as it does in the Hungarians' case.

**Table 5.** *The proportion of NoCRoSC students and Non-Gypsy/Roma Hungarians agreeing with statements regarding work.*

	Proportion of Agreement (%)	
	NoCRoSC	Hungarians
Work is always in first place, even if it jeopardises free time	24***	61
It is humiliating to get money if one does not work for it	42***	56
Work is necessary for development, self-realisation	57***	86

Data source for Hungarian population: EVS 2008. The EVS data is filtered to the age group of the NoCRoSC students

\*\*\* Significance level: 0.001

However, if we ask how important work is in their life, just like the Hungarians, Roma/Gypsy students considered work as the second most important item in their life after their families. Furthermore, it was considered more important by them than by their Hungarian counterparts.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> A detailed discussion of this difference and the Gypsies' general attitude towards work is beyond the limits of this paper. For a possible explanation, see for example Stewart (1997, especially Chapter 2, and pp. 37-9 in Chapter 3).



Regarding parent-child responsibilities (Table 6) students in NoCRoSC feel more responsibilities towards both parents and children than their non-Gypsy counterparts. They also feel more responsibility towards unborn children. Their views on children's reliance on parents, child-raising as social responsibility and the moral imperative that we must love and honour our parents do not differ significantly from the views of society in general. However, their views on what values children should and can be taught at home are rather telling. Unlike non-Gypsy Hungarians, these students consider responsibility along with tolerance and respect the most important values children should acquire at home. Their non-Gypsy peers view responsibility only as the third most important quality – after manners and diligence – children can be taught at home.

**Table 6.** *The proportion of NoCRoSC students and Non-Gypsy/Roma Hungarians agreeing with statements regarding parent-child duties*

	Proportion of Agreement (%)	
	NoCRoSC	Hungarians
Parents must do everything for children, even if it jeopardises their comfort and prosperity	92***	77
Children need both father and mother	93	94
Child-raising is social responsibility	36	36
Abortion is acceptable if the woman is unmarried	24***	59
Abortion is acceptable if they do not want more children	40***	70
Parents must be honoured and loved always	79	75
Grown-up children must take care of their sick parents	86***	58

Data source for Hungarian population: EVS 2008. The EVS data is filtered to the age group of the NoCRoSC students.

\*\*\* Significance level: 0.001

It can also be said that NoCRoSC students participate in greater proportion in public life than their non-Gypsy Hungarian peers. While almost 90 percent of these students are members of different organizations, their non-Gypsy counterparts make up only about 30 percent. Similarly, the proportion of students doing voluntary work is between 60 and 80 percent<sup>19</sup>, the figure for non-Gypsy peers is only 25 percent. However, the students' high participation in public life is not

<sup>19</sup> Depending on the year of investigation.



surprising in itself, especially if we recall that one of the modules of NoCRoSC is preparation for public life.

### **General and Religious Characteristics of Members of the Roma/Gypsy Missionary Movement<sup>20</sup>**

Almost two thirds of the congregations (61 %) within the missionary movement consist of less than 50 people; and the membership of another quarter (24 %) is between 50 and 99. In other words, we are talking about relatively small congregations. Similarly, almost two thirds (60%) are ethnically homogenous, i.e. the membership consists entirely of Roma/Gypsy people. Again, almost two thirds (62%) of the membership do not speak any Gypsy language, while a quarter (27%) speak Romani dialect. The distribution of sexes is even, although there is a difference between the charismatic and non-charismatic movements. While the proportion of men and women in the former is rather even (48% vs 52%), in the non-charismatic congregations, men are overrepresented (65% vs. 35%).

Twenty percent of the respondents joined the congregation alone, while almost half of them (46%) entered the congregation with their family. It also means that the majority (70%) are married and live with their spouse. Almost two thirds of the respondents (61%) live in households with five or more members. More than half (54%) are middle-aged, i.e. they are between the age of 31 and 50. The proportion of unmarried people is rather low, less than 14 percent. The so-called 'unethical relationships' – from a Christian point of view – make up only 7.2 percent of which 6 percent are common-law relationships. The average number of children is 2.91.

Regarding their educational level, more than half (57%) have only primary education, and another 15 percent did not even finish it. Seven percent graduated from secondary school; and 1.5 percent have a college or university degree. In the light of the educational level, perhaps it is less surprising that a quarter of the respondents (26%) are unemployed. More than half of those who have a job work in governmental budgetary institutions, while 29 percent are self-employed, and another 8 percent work in different ecclesiastical institutions.

Their religious characteristics are determined by the dominantly charismatic, neo-Pentecostal and Protestant nature of the missionary movement. Nine out of ten people consider faith, Bible knowledge and reading, religious experience, the community, and prayer as rather important in their life. Only 80 percent judged dogmas, religious feelings and emotions important; and even fewer, half of the respondents viewed rituals as essential in their life.

Three quarters of the respondents (73%) listen to religious music daily. 92 percent pray on a daily basis, and only 3 percent pray occasionally. These numbers are rather telling if we consider that 53 percent of men and 30 percent of women in Hungary never pray. Four out of five (85%) go to the house of prayer on a

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<sup>20</sup> In the description of general characteristics I rely on Gyetvai – Rajki (2014) while in the religious characterization I follow Gyetvai (2018).

weekly basis, 6 percent frequent it monthly, while the rest of the respondents visit it biweekly.

Measuring the so-called 'religious distance', respondents were asked how close they let God to themselves. As Table 7 indicates, about 90 percent of them could be considered deeply religious in so far as their everyday life can be determined by a religious agent – God.

**Table 7.** *The extent of closeness to which God can get to a Roma/Gypsy person, according to the respondents*

<b>The extent of closeness</b>	<b>%</b>
Can observe only from the outside	0.4
Can influence only the religious aspects of my life	1.5
Can influence the non- religious aspects of my life as well	18.6
Can ask the greatest sacrifice as well	71.1
Uncertain about the answer	8.4

Religious distance was probed by another question, which was somewhat similar to the NoCRoSC students' question on the issue of whether the churches can give appropriate answers in different spheres of life.<sup>21</sup> Here, however, respondents were asked whether it is acceptable if the church tries to have a say in different personal issues (Table 8). The results indicate that about two thirds of them find it acceptable if the church tries to influence them in their private life.

**Table 8.** *Proportion of Respondents Who Consider It Acceptable that the Church Have a Say in Different Areas of Life*

<b>Areas of Life</b>	<b>Acceptable (%)</b>
<b>Moral question</b>	66
<b>Mate selection</b>	59
<b>Life style</b>	69
<b>Sexual life before marriage</b>	73

However, the question remains whether this religious influence manifests itself in the life of the believers. In other words, the question is whether the faithful take the teaching of the church to heart and feel a responsibility to observe it. This will be discussed in the following part.

21 C.f. Table 4.

## Religious Influence in Everyday Life: The Issue of Responsibility

In the questionnaire respondents had the option of listing three areas where in their opinion the life of believers had changed. The results are presented in Table 9. The high proportions of changing life style, recovery from addictions, and moral improvement are eye-catching. We might conclude that it is not unreasonable to think that church teaching had an influence on the life of the believers. It is also reasonable to assume that the feeling of personal responsibility in observing the rules recommended by the church was also at work.

**Table 9.** *The Proportion of Different Changes in the Life of Believers*

Type of Change	Proportion (%)
Changing ethnicity	1.5
Recovery from addiction	23.5
Physical healing	1.0
Improvement in family relations	4.7
Moral improvement	19.7
Changing life style	48.9
No change, or worsening	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## Conclusion

We have seen two religious frameworks in which the value of accepting responsibility was analysed. In this concluding part, it is worthwhile to compare the two settings with a focus on the value of responsibility (Table 10). While the missionary movement started at the grass root level, NoCRoSC was established by the hierarchy of the traditional Hungarian Christian churches. The origins of the missionary movement go back to the Communist era in the late 1970s, whereas the network of Roma colleges was established in 2011. The former counts at least thousands in its membership in Hungary, the latter involves ‘only’ a few hundred students.

**Table 10.** *Summary of the Aspects of Responsibility in the Two Religious Settings*

	<b>NoCRoSC</b>	<b>Roma Missionary Movement</b>
Initiator	Church hierarchy	Grass root
Beginning	2011	1970s
Volume	A few hundreds	(Tens of) thousands
Type of responsibility	For the Roma people	Among the Roma people
Communal benefit(s)	Prolonged	Immediate
Relationship with host society	Mixed environment	Somewhat segregated
Family/Community ties	To be preserved	Strong

In the case of NoCRoSC, the responsibility felt is *for* the Roma/Gypsy by non-Roma people while in the missionary movement it is experienced *among* the Roma/Gypsy people by and for themselves. Apart from the individual benefits which can be felt immediately in both settings, there are also communal benefits. In the case of the network of colleges where students are expected to keep in touch with their Roma/Gypsy communities, the benefit can only be materialized after the students' graduation, if ever. However, in the case of the missionary movement, the congregation itself is already a communal benefit not only in its organizational form, but also in the beneficial changes produced in the member's life.

While the colleges intentionally mix Roma/Gypsy students with their non-Gypsy peers, the congregations of the missionary movement experience a certain level of segregation in so far as their membership is ethnically rather homogenous. And finally, whereas the colleges 'uproot' the students from their families and communities – at least temporarily with the intention of 'sending them back' – the congregations are themselves creating a community for the membership. What is more, they strengthen the families both of those which join the congregations as a unit and of the individual persons through whom other family members also benefit from the changes in the lives of the converted.

In both cases, it is to be seen whether the changes are for the long run. It also means that we have to keep researching these initiatives, not only their existence, functioning and activities, but also the values that motivate them. It also necessitates a comparative value research in the hope of highlighting the differences between the value systems of the Gypsy/Roma people and their non-Gypsy counterparts.

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## ISLAMIC ECUMENISM REDEFINED: A HUNGARIAN MUSLIM LEADER'S "REFORMED SHARIA" FOR EVERYDAY MUSLIMS AND EUROPE

**Abstract:** This paper explores the idea of a reformed *sharia* and its potential for redefining ecumenism and engagement with everyday Islam in Europe. It builds its argument on interviews conducted with the founder of the Hungarian Muslim community Balázs Mihálffy. He promotes an ambitious reform project of Islamic law, in his 2428-page Quran commentary, and throughout his life trajectory of ecumenism and work on *sharia*. Mihálffy's understanding of *sharia* as a solution to the predicaments of Islam and Europe, which comes at a critical time, is presented and analyzed here in both its resources and limits. We also examine his *sharia* claim in the current debates of the anthropology of Islam in Europe, the context of Islam in Hungary and the reception of *sharia*-claims by European lawyers and institutions.

### Keywords:

Ecumenism; Hungarian Muslims; *sharia*; Balázs Mihálffy; reform

### Introduction

The term ecumenism is used here to mean the inclusivist idea or attitude of promoting unity beyond religions, especially of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, on the foundation of a common platform rooted in the idea of monotheism. It is endorsed by many Muslims, including reformist thinkers and activists. Throughout this paper, "ecumenical Islam" will not refer to the dialogical aspect of the relationship between faiths, in its narrow sense, although this aspect constitutes a component of ecumenism as we envision it here. Interfaith dialogue has been going on in Europe for the last forty years or more without any significant result in terms of bridging the gap between the different religious communities.<sup>1</sup> In this religi-

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1 The most recent example of this clash is the debate in France in April 2018 over the "manifesto against the new anti-Semitism" in which 300 public intellectuals in France accuse Muslims of anti-Semitism. These intellectuals include an ex-president, ex-prime ministers and eminent philosophers denouncing what they perceive as systematic attacks on Jews by Muslims in the French suburban areas.

See: ANTISÉMITISME 2018.

ous diplomacy, open-minded theologians of the three religions practice a tedious inter-religious dialogue, hoping to achieve world peace and build trust between different religious communities, while clearly setting the boundaries of interaction and entertaining theologically and politically exclusivist systems.

As Islam became part of Europe, professed by populations, organisations and ideas since the 1960s, some Islamic interpretations of the public sphere and freedom clashed with Christian and Jewish religious attitudes on these fundamental matters for social co-existence. Inter-religious platforms established mostly by Christian religious leaders have a hard time changing the relations between communities. There is, however, an increasing demand for ecumenism that can be observed in Europe among Muslims. Some young Muslims, either Sufis, social workers, interfaith families or simple citizens who feel proximity with Christianity or the necessity to get along with it in order to live peacefully in Europe, endorse an Islamic ethics that can be labelled as “ecumenical Islam”. Usually, these individuals are non-practicing Muslims, with loose links to the religious and political Islamic institutions. They are to be encountered among “everyday Muslims” or among highly educated Muslims or multicultural Muslims, in the form of a universal discourse or thinking, with very little activities, and their focus is rather on the universal/Western/cosmopolitan/liberal mindset. The gap between this “ecumenical Islam” and the dominating religious discourses among the Muslim communities is dramatic. To express this ecumenical sensitivity, few Muslim leaders, either theologians or intellectuals, strive to craft convincing ideas of a genuine ecumenical meeting with the other.

Currently in Europe, this type of ecumenical thinking is challenged by at least two major problems: first, one can list Islamist violence in Europe, and the radicalisation of a part of the Muslim community, frustrated by marginalization and framed by Islamism, increasing mistrust between Europe and Islam, with the consequence that many Europeans lost faith in the capacity of Muslim leaders to respond to the violence caused by radical Muslims. Second, the core of Islam is *sharia*, a set of legal and ethical rules stated or inspired by the foundational texts of Islam. *Sharia* establishes the boundaries of dealing with non-Muslims and the behavioural norms in diverse social, economic and political aspects of public, as well as private matters, making an “ecumenical life” restrained if not banned according to the dominating interpretations of *sharia*.

Demand for an “ecumenical Islam” thus hopes for the emergence of reformist Muslims sufficiently credible in their community and authentically open to the values of liberal democracy in order to integrate Muslim communities in its structures and discourses. Above all, they are expected to solve the two major problems of the clash between Islam and Europe, namely violence and *sharia*. This demand is equally intensive among the young generations of Muslims in Europe and ruling elites in most European countries.

Ecumenism in Islam, as a quest for unity beyond religions, has been studied by many researchers focusing on esoteric Sufism. This is, however, a marginal trend within Sufism and current Islam in general, dominated by legal and theological



interpretations, framed in global or local political claims. Few contemporary reformists, who are embedded in the legal enterprise of Islam or at least committed to it and yet developing ecumenical views, attracted research and attention in the West. Abdullahi Ahmed an-Na'im, a Sudanese professor of Islamic law at Emory University studied Mahmud Muhammad Taha (1909-1985), a Sudanese liberal Muslim reformist and the way he reinterprets the law about the *dhimmi*s, as particular to the context of Medina (622-632), non-universal in principle, and promotes co-existence with Christians in Sudan on the model of the Meccan period (610-622), as being universal and reflecting ethical values.<sup>2</sup> In 1997, Ataullah Siddiqui examined the work of the Tunisian reformist Mohamed Talbi (1921-2017), and his attempt to reconsider the notion of *umma*, community to include non-Muslims, on the model of the constitution of Medina.<sup>3</sup> More recently, and in the context of post-2011 Egypt, Dominique Avon (France) and Amin Elias (Lebanon) investigated the oeuvre of Gamal al-Banna, an Egyptian reformist (1920-2013) who attempted to review the sources of Islamic law in order to incorporate freedom for non-believers and secularism, considering the Copts as brothers in citizenship and religion.<sup>4</sup>

It must be noted that in Islamic studies and social sciences, scholars agree that *sharia* is an equivocal term that could convey different meanings in different contexts. Two recent and authoritative works confirmed this widely held view. The first is edited by Baudouin Dupret *La charia aujourd'hui: usages de la référence au droit islamique*<sup>5</sup> and the second is edited by Timothy P. Daniels *Sharia Dynamics: Islamic Law and Sociopolitical Processes*.<sup>6</sup> They both show that the uses and dynamics of *sharia* vary considerably according to its different settings; they are more flexible in pluralistic contexts such as Malaysia and Indonesia, more rigid in Pakistan and in Arab Islamist movements, while liberal in the fields of finance or in the *fatwas* issued in the period of the "Arab Spring". None of the researchers who contributed to these two books intended to argue that *sharia* is somewhere one and definite and then it adapts to different contexts, although titles can lend to this understanding. On the contrary, their idea is that it is impossible to identify one *sharia* today and that there are *sharias* according to the context and the authority that claims it, without really resembling the classical *sharia*, because that did not have a definite form either.

Up to now, far too little attention has been devoted to "ecumenical Islam" which operates a redefinition of *sharia* in order to incorporate European legal systems. Much uncertainty still exists about the capacity of Muslim leaders to reshape and integrate *sharia* that vary in a secularist European context. This paper gives an account of an attempt by a Hungarian Muslim leader, Balázs Mihálffy to redefine *sharia* for Europe, putting it into the perspective of the Muslim presence in Europe in general.

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2 AN-NA'IM 1988.

3 SIDDIQUI 1997.

4 AVON and ELIAS 2013.

5 DUPRET 2012.

6 DANIELS 2017.

## 1. The perception of ecumenism among Hungarian Muslims

Mihálffy became acquainted with Islam while sharing a room with a Sudanese student in a university dormitory in Hungary. Having spent years in Africa and after gaining a higher degree from the Azhar university that qualified him as a shaykh, Mihálffy returned to Hungary where he founded the Hungarian Muslim Community in the late 1980s. Being an agricultural engineer prompted him to dedicate special attention to *halal* labelling for which he set up a certifying enterprise seated in Vienna. He elaborated an inclusive understanding of *halal* based on ethics, focusing on the purpose of the notion: producing, selling and consuming food that does good to the human body and corresponds to natural law in its Islamic understanding. Answering the question of whether branding in itself causes segregation, Mihálffy proposed that corresponding to a certain religious criterion can be considered as an additional, beneficent characteristic of a food product offered to the wider public without making the labelling central. Similarly, he understands *hijab* as a way of dressing that does not attract attention but fully fits into the environment and is modest at the same time.<sup>7</sup> Mihálffy is a regular guest at round table discussions welcomed by the Jesuit-run Párbeszéd Háza (The House of Dialogue) in Budapest and Miklós Beer Bishop of Vác among others. However, his position and views do not resonate with the current trends among Hungarian Muslims. To illustrate their perception of integration and *sharia* we quote some relevant *fatwas* available on the most popular website, *iszlam.com* run by the biggest Hungarian Muslim community, the Organization of Muslims in Hungary (Magyarországi Muszlimok Egyháza).

The first of the *fatwas* studied deals with the question of religious education. On this the ruling is strict: Muslim students have to be exempted from any religious or ethics classes other than Islamic.<sup>8</sup> This approach suggests a straightforward ideological separation from the majority society. Another *fatwa* states that holidays rooted in the Christian tradition that gained social, cultural importance such as All Saints' Day are also to be avoided as they are non-Islamic. The reasoning concludes with a fundamentalist statement: "It is a good for Muslims to pray for Muslims. However, praying for non-Muslims is not possible."<sup>9</sup> The same conservative, fundamentalist approach is reflected in the *fatwa* arguing against greeting or participating "in the religious festivals of idolaters and the People of Book." This opinion references Ibn Taymiyya and his disciple Ibn al-Qayyim,

7 Interview conducted by the authors of the present article with Balázs Mihálffy

8 A muszlim családoknak hogyan kell eljárniuk a bevezetendő kötelező iskolai hitoktatással kapcsolatban? [What must Muslim families do in connection with the compulsory religious education to be introduced in the schools?] <http://iszlam.com/kerdes-valasz/vallasi-velemenyek-fatwak/item/2085-hitoktatasi> (Accessed on 25. 05. 2018)

9 Általános kérdések és válaszok az iszlámmal kapcsolatban. [General questions and answers on Islam] <http://iszlam.com/kerdes-valasz/altalanos-kerdesek/item/2099-altalanos-kerdesek-es-valaszok-az-iszlammal-kapcsolatban> (Accessed on 25. 05. 2018)

legal scholars of the 14<sup>th</sup> century who are considered as religious authorities of the Salafi interpretation of Islam.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the funeral of non-Muslim parents or close relatives, the *fatwa* prompts further alienation from the majority saying that Muslims may attend them “but they should not take part in prayers and in other religious rituals.”<sup>11</sup> In the perception of Hungarian Muslim leaders, social customs and norms are subordinated to religious regulations as reflected in the following *fatwa*: “Based on the beliefs and behaviours of the Islamic religion and what is explained above, attending swimming pools and beaches for children older than 5 to 6 years is not recommended. After reaching adolescence, it is strongly contraindicated.”<sup>12</sup>

Another set of legal opinions deals with economic issues and displays some degree of flexibility in as much as it serves the needs and prosperity of Muslims. It argues that if prohibiting a loan with interest “would deprive Muslims of having an opportunity to have their own home and family, which is a basic necessity it is permissible, since here the Muslim ‘feeds’ the usury (he pays the interest) and does not ‘eat’ it (he does not benefit from the interest). The original ban refers to the beneficiary of the interest rather than to its payer, as explained in the Quran. [In it] both the use and the taking of interest are prohibited, in order to block the leeway for everyone and not to leave any opportunity for abuse.”<sup>13</sup> In this reasoning the idea of interest, *mašlaḥa* can be detected. It does not discard or reinterpret the relevant *sharia* ruling but rather creates a hierarchy of priorities in which religious ethics is substituted by moral economy.

On *iszlamlam.com* we can read about Islamic identity defined as holistic, universal and marked by distinguished characteristics. “It specifies the purpose, the function and the distant purpose [of the believers] precisely and clearly (...) [It] provides [them] with the basic elements of survival and preserves their culture and ideology so they do not get absorbed into other nations (...) Forced assimilation may weaken the Islamic identity for certain communities, but it is quite certain that the process will not happen, since this religion is guarded by Allah, and Allah has guaranteed its preservation (...) Muslims are obliged to stick to this identity, and not allowed to leave it.” This identity is the only source of pride and creates a close bond and loyalty between the believers.<sup>14</sup>

10 Gratuláció a nem-muszlimoknak, ünnepeik alkalmából. [Greetings to non-Muslims on the occasion of their feast days] <http://iszlamlam.com/kerdes-valasz/altalanos-kerdesek/item/1739-gratulacio-a-nem-muszlimoknak-unnepeik-alkalmabol> (Accessed on 25. 05. 2018)

11 Résztvétel a nem-muszlim rokonok temetkezési szertartásában. [Participation in the funeral ceremonies of non-Muslim relatives] <http://iszlamlam.com/kerdes-valasz/altalanos-kerdesek/item/1742-reszvetelanem-muszlimrokonoktemetkezesiszertartasaban> (Accessed on 25. 05. 2018)

12 Úszás serdülőkort elért gyermekek esetében. [Swimming for children who have reached adolescence] <http://iszlamlam.com/kerdes-valasz/vallasi-velemenyek-fatwak/item/2089-uszas-serdulokort-elert-gyermekek-eseteben> (Accessed on 25. 05. 2018)

13 Kamatozó banki kölcsönből vásárolt magán ingatlan esete nem iszlám országban. [The case of private property bought with interest-paying bank loans in a non-Islamic country] <http://iszlamlam.com/kerdes-valasz/altalanos-kerdesek/item/1738-kamatozobankikolcsonbolvasaroltmaganingatlan-esetenemiszlamszagban> (Accessed on 25. 05. 2018)

14 A muszlim identitás és megőrzése Nyugaton. [Muslim identity and its preservation in the West] <http://iszlamlam.com/iszlamlam-az-elet-vallasa/iszlamlam-es-nyugat/item/1317-a-muszlim-identitas-es-megorzese-nyugaton> (Accessed on 27. 05. 2018)

About religious diversity and dialogue an article entitled “The culture of tolerance as perceived by Muslims” explains that “Religious difference is Allah’s will in this world. Therefore, there is no point in trying to make the whole earth follow a particular religion (...) According to Islam, no one is responsible for the choice of religion for others, since it is an individual decision, and only God will judge people for the correctness of their religion (...) those who are subject to Allah, cannot go beyond the civilized framework of dialogue or resort to violence.<sup>15</sup> This understanding of tolerance cautiously maintains the supremacy of Islam, while stating that other religions are tolerated by Allah and therefore Muslims are not allowed to use violence in order to spread Islam, however non-Muslims have to face God’s judgement regarding their beliefs.

Another article entitled “Muslim identity and its preservation in the West” sets the principles for social (interfaith) dialogue as follows:

1. Emphasizing common human denominators and human values instead of differences.
2. Emphasizing dialogue and co-operation between civilizations instead of clashing with civilizations
3. Use of moderate communication as it is a characteristic of the identity of the Muslim *umma* (community)
4. Applying an intellectual, objective, and tactful tone rather than impulsive, confrontational speech
5. Showing readiness to compromise in the discourse between the individual and the society in order to deepen the organic belonging of the Muslim individual to the society
6. Showing pride in the [Muslim] identity: “And who is better in speech than one who invites to Allah and does righteousness and says, ‘Indeed, I am of the Muslims’.” (Quran 41:33)<sup>16</sup>

Abdul-Fattah Munif, the author of the article cited above is actively engaged in interfaith dialogue and is a regular guest at various forums.<sup>17</sup> His theoretical summary is a tactical guideline, and mixture of lenience and flexibility as far as communication is concerned and of proselytism and feeling of superiority as a Muslim. However, the *fatwas* published at the same website do not reflect a

15 A tolerancia kultúrája a muszlimoknál. [The culture of tolerance among Muslims] <http://iszlami.com/iszlami-az-elet-vallasa/iszlami-es-nyugat/item/1235-a-tolerancia-kulturaja-a-muszlimoknal> (Accessed on 28. 05. 2018)

16 A muszlim identitás és megőrzése Nyugaton. [Muslim identity and its preservation in the West] <http://iszlami.com/iszlami-az-elet-vallasa/iszlami-es-nyugat/item/1317-a-muszlim-identitas-es-megorzese-nyugaton> (Accessed on 27. 05. 2018)

17 “Közelkép az iszlámról” – Könyvbemutatót tartottak a Párbeszéd Házában. [“Close-up of Islam” – Book launch held in the House of Dialogue] <http://www.magyarkurir.hu/hirek/-kozelkep-az-iszlami-rol-konyvbemutato-tartottak-parbeszed-hazaban/> (Accessed on 26. 05. 2018)

Térézvárosi vallásközi konferencia a misztikáról. [Interfaith conference in Térézváros on mysticism] <https://www.magyarkurir.hu/hirek/a-misztikarol-beszelgettek-terezvarosi-vallaskozi-konferencian> (Accessed on 26. 05. 2018)

reformed or modernist approach in practice. The section on interfaith dialogue displays only a propaganda video,<sup>18</sup> and events open to non-Muslims such as the *World Hijab Day Hungary - A Kendő Világnapja* have an implicit missionary purpose.<sup>19</sup>

Identity, as perceived by the legal experts of the Hungarian Muslim Community, is based on “common faith, common history, common language, and common home (common homeland or common geographical location). In addition, there are less positive identity-forming elements such as common economic interests or envisioning a common enemy.” The argument suggests that identity has various layers as well, of which “in Islam the most significant is undoubtedly faith that keeps the other elements in balance.” After detailing the primary principles of faith, the Muslim community is defined as “the best nation” and identity as “a map that brings us back to our real country (Paradise)”. In this reasoning the primacy of religion is explicit, nation is equated with faith community, and homeland is substituted by a religious concept, Paradise.

As a consequence, integration has no clear definition. The article says: “When a Muslim man integrates himself in the society in which he lives, preserving the principles of Islamic faith in his heart and embracing the Islamic lifestyle, and thus expresses the concept of Islamic identity.” This understanding envisions integration as making the *sharia* integral to the host society without any compromise, flexibility or adapting to the non-Muslim majority context. Dr. Zoltán Sulok, president of the MME would begin the process of successful integration with the introduction of Islam to society so that Muslims are not regarded as aliens in the society (...)The integration of the majority of Muslims has been realized. The society welcomed them. We should introduce ourselves to those who have prejudices against us. That is why we have publications and press events.”<sup>20</sup> In other words, Sulok upholds the view that the host society has to change and adapt to the Islam as presented to them, in this tactful communication has a key role, while reformist reading is not on the agenda. Sulok participates in events where he is called to spread the news about an allegedly non-radical version of Islam professed by his Organisation.<sup>21</sup> As explained in what follows, Balázs Mihálffy’s reformist approach differs from this perception in depth.

## 2. Mihálffy’s approach and the predicament of *sharia* in Europe

Balázs Mihálffy argues that at the root of current tensions and misunderstandings between Islam and Europe, is that doctrine and the law (*sharia*) are considered as inseparable in the hearts and minds of Muslims, at least according to the ortho-

18 Vallások közötti párbeszéd. [Interfaith dialogue] <http://iszlami.com/iszlami-az-elet-vallasa/iszlami-es-nyugat/item/307-vallasok-kozotti-parbeszed> (Accessed on 28. 05. 2018)

19 World Hijab Day Hungary - A Kendő Világnapja. <http://iszlami.com/hirek/item/2482-world-hijab-day-hungary-a-kendo-vilagnapja> (Accessed on 27. 05. 2018)

20 SZENTÁGOTAY 2011. 88-89.

21 <http://www.magyarurir.hu/hirek/egy-vallasos-magyar-muszlim-az-iszlami-alapjairol-sulok-zoltan-volt-keteg-szalon-vendege> [A religious Hungarian Muslim on the foundations of Islam. Zoltán Sulok was guest of Keteg Salon]

dox-dominated views of Islam based on legal-theological institutions, whether in Sunni or Shiite Islam. According to Mihálffy, doctrine and law are distinct issues and could be dealt with separately. As he puts it:

Europe is not prepared to deal with such a mindset. For Muslims, freedom of religion means not only the freedom of spreading the doctrine and religious practice but also the freedom to apply the *sharia*. So, when we deal with the *ḥalāl / ḥarām* regulations we deal only with a sub-branch of the *mu‘āmalāt* (transactions). Therefore, we cannot regulate or tackle any phenomenon of Muslim religiosity without a holistic perspective that concerns the entire system. This is the same with the concept of sin and infringement or offenses. There are certain actions that are contrary to the western legal norms but they are not considered as such by Islamic law or they are even praised. The growing ratio of Muslims in Europe poses the need to find a *modus vivendi* with them while maintaining the law and order of the state.<sup>22</sup>

A recent account by Lisbet Christoffersen and Jørgen S. Nielsen corroborates Mihálffy's claim, and asserts that "for some sections of the Muslim communities in Europe, aspects of custom related in some way to Islam...remain so persistent that for the legislator and the judge to ignore them is tantamount to institutionalizing severe injustice".<sup>23</sup> Conversely, Nilüfer Göle argues that everyday Muslims in Europe believe that Europe is a privileged framework because they are encouraged to live according to their conscience, by abandoning all references to *sharia*. Others created a limited theory of *sharia*, a sort of minimalist orthodoxy, by limiting Islamic legislation to cult practices (*‘ibādāt*) and moral principles (*akh-lāq*).<sup>24</sup> She interviewed a couple of young Muslims in Switzerland in whose life, as she puts it "*sharia* does not take up a large place as a legal system and even less as a penal code... in a self-confident way, and even with some pride, they affirm their feeling of belonging to the European cultural area, even more so as they distance themselves from *sharia*"<sup>25</sup>. These two accounts summarise quite well the cleavage of interpretations of *sharia* among Muslims in Europe, and the complexity of Muslim appropriations of *sharia*.

### 3. An ecumenical *sharia* for Europe?

For Balázs Mihálffy, the solution for this predicament can be found in the consideration of *sharia* as a flexible system, which, according to him, has always been flexible. As he argues:

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Balázs Mihálffy.

<sup>23</sup> CHRISTOFFERSEN and NIELSEN 2009. xiii.

<sup>24</sup> GÖLE 2017. 85.

<sup>25</sup> GÖLE 2017. 85-86.



If we look at the development of the *sharia* in the various parts of the growing Islamic empire, we find that it incorporated in itself a great number of elements from the local customary law and Islamified them. Therefore, *sharia* is adaptable. It was one of the conditions that allowed Islam to put down roots from Central Asia to the Iberian Peninsula as well as in the Far East and Sub-Saharan Africa. Even today when Muslims from different parts of the world meet, they realize that not only legal schools divide them but their local customs as well, most of which are abiding as if they were part of the *sharia*. Until 1924, the fall of the caliphate, this complexity was managed by the allegiance to the central religious authority, even if nominal. Ever since the abolishment of the caliphate the Muslim psyche has suffered from the duality resulting from the separation of doctrine and law. In this context, in their understanding, the freedom of religion in the West offers a unique opportunity to restore the desired unity. This is a menace in as much as the West cannot get control of it. The common belief in this regard is: either secularism, or Islam, since they have no common ground. However, rather than imposing an enforced choice – which usually provokes more antagonism towards the secular order – Europe should set the frame by elaborating a new Islamic law which is based on harmonisation with the European legal system. Unfortunately, it seems that we cannot expect this process to be done by Muslim religious experts. It has to be prepared and offered – I mean here making it obligatory – by Western legal experts. Western law is much more developed and has to show the path of adapting *sharia*.<sup>26</sup>

We asked Balázs Mihálffy whether his call to Western lawyers to adapt *sharia* for Muslims and Europe has so far generated any reactions, especially in Hungary. He said that he received two kinds of reactions. On the one hand, he faced a faced disinterest by some lawyers who, in his view, were too narrow-minded to see the importance of the matter. Others, however, including the ex-president of Hungary László Sólyom (President of Hungary from 2005 to 2010), an internationally acknowledged expert of constitutional law, were quite open, and found his idea of incorporating some elements of *sharia* into the legal systems of Europe as worth further consideration after a harmonisation process. There are precedents for this logic in some countries such as South Africa which took into account African customs in shaping a new law for the republic after the end of apartheid in early 1990s.

The question of the place of *sharia* law in European legal systems has been recurrent in the recent debates in Europe. Lorenzo Zucca, in his *A Secular Europe: Law and Religion in the European Constitutional Landscape* offers one of the most extensive discussions of the subject. He maintains that “the place of *sharia* law in European political societies varies. It is incorrect to believe that we can simply turn a blind eye to religious laws or to treat them as irrelevant. They are very relevant for a growing number of people, and secular states want to be able to moni-

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Balázs Mihálffy.

for the way in which religious norms affect the lives of people".<sup>27</sup> Zucca discusses four models of interaction between *sharia* and European legal systems: "total legal indifference towards religious norms, possible ways of accommodating religious norms into the ordinary legal system, the possibility of multiple jurisdictions of religious and non-religious kinds and the parallel legal systems whereby religious norms have a life independent from secular norms".<sup>28</sup>

What is overlooked in this account, and in many other studies, is the very nature of *sharia* for its proponents. The claims of *sharia* are diffused and embraced by Islamist activists whose project lies not only in the making of a reasonable accommodation over *sharia*, assuming that such accommodation is acceptable for them and for European lawyers, but aims at an integral socio-political system they believe should be applied in the European societies, supported by religious clerics who benefit from sponsoring an extended version of *sharia*. The supporters of *sharia* do not consider it to be shaped by public interest and botched up legislation by elected people, who can change it. For them, *sharia* is divine in essence.

Balázs Mihálffy does not believe in this Islamist view of *sharia* and thinks that *sharia* is flexible enough to adapt as circumstances change. He mistrusts two types of proponents of *sharia* currently widespread in Europe. First, the radical, fundamentalist interpreters of Islam whom he accuses of greed, fanaticism, backwardness and ignorance. In his view, the *fatwas* they deliver serve "business" interests they try to maintain and, therefore, he considers them as agents of blind conservatism, extremism, and obscurantism. Second, Mihálffy distrusts the Muslim Brotherhood offshoots everywhere, which he considers to be part of a global political Islamist strategy, funded by Gulf countries, and determined to install Islamic societies in Europe.

As far as the process of accommodating *sharia* in Europe is concerned, Mihálffy believes it is similar to:

Linguistic interpretation: conveying ideas in the language of the other. Enforcing secular law through the *sharia*, in a scientific and systematic manner. In practice, we have to differentiate between legislation, jurisdiction and arbitration. Legislation refers to the national law-making process of Parliament. In this, *sharia* cannot have any scope, it cannot influence national legislation. In the field of jurisdiction, a legal court, *maḥkama shar'iyya* can be set up where the harmonised law is in fact applied. The third layer is that of arbitration that refers to the private sphere where certain customs and traditions can be maintained. The host society has to be prepared to provide the structure to which they have to adapt. The structure must be called Islamic with proper legal and Muslim references in order to be accepted by Muslims but containing only those elements that are in accordance with the European law, as well as the principles of Western law based on the reformist interpretation of Islamic scriptures.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Zucca 2012. 119.

<sup>28</sup> Zucca 2012. 132-133.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Balázs Mihálffy.



Mihálffy suggests a diversification of legal tools to allow various layers of “*sharia*-embedded-as-law” or “law-embedded-as-*sharia*” in the European legal systems. As in any legal system, legislation and jurisdiction can overlap or even conflict. Here two questions have to be answered. First, whether the decrees issued by the legislative authority on matters of religious importance – such as euthanasia – can be accommodated in the *sharia* law or not. Second, whether, assuming that such accommodation is achievable, it could be persuasive to the large Muslim communities or not.

Beyond such legal conflicts, the very idea that a society should revise and adapt its laws to a particular religion in order to persuade its believers to embrace national law is not in line with the European legal traditions and social standards. One argument that we often heard from different European interlocutors is that Europe cannot adapt itself each time to a newly-arriving religion, because, as a matter of fact, Europe adopted for centuries secular laws and expects the newcomers to synchronize their religious laws with the secular laws at work. This perception is also related to the belief that laws stem from public conventions and they are inherent to the sum of interests of a nation. While many Europeans we talked to are willing to accept that *sharia* could prevail in private matters, and even in the economy, they definitely oppose any presence of *sharia* in the public sphere, intended as the space of social and political interaction, for whatsoever reason, and indeed they oppose any other form of religious law in the public space.

Mihálffy’s proposal needs to be contextualized both in the Hungarian context and in the wider European context. With regard to the Hungarian context, Mihálffy believes that the current policy of Hungary in terms of migration is focused on the strategy of fighting mass migration while, in his view, there should be an accompanying, proactive strategy of integrating Muslims in countries where they exist in large numbers. His assessment of the Hungarian Muslim communities is no less permissive. He thinks that these communities are embryonic, in terms of their numbers and their projects, and are far from engaging in a reflection on *sharia*. It is, therefore, a matter of quest for horizon, very limited in Hungary, which pushes Mihálffy to look to the wider European context.

Yet, aside from the negative image of *sharia* in European public opinions, European institutions are not particularly welcoming to *sharia*. For example, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that “*sharia* clearly diverges from the European Convention of Human Rights’ values”.<sup>30</sup> At best, some European countries recognise the role of *sharia* in family law (marriage and divorce in particular) contracted in the countries of origin or subject to arbitration in the host societies, and in recent times, Islamic finance. Thus, a Pakistani couple in England might be divorced in accordance with Pakistani (Muslim) family law.<sup>31</sup> This is the main role of the *sharia* councils in the UK which deal with family matters, and divorce in particular.<sup>32</sup>

30 BERGER 2013. 7.

31 BERGER 2013. 10.

32 ROHE 2015. 11.

Mihálffy is aware that *sharia* has different interpretations adopted by the several Muslim schools of law (currently seven living schools are functioning in the Muslim world). As he puts it “the schools of law are untenable. They belong to historical Islam not to classical Islam. *Sharia* should be sought in the classical sources because the schools of law brought only friction to Islam”.<sup>33</sup> He accuses the *muftis*, the legal scholars of Islam who operate in Europe of being scholastic, following their respective legal schools, without any ability to engage with European realities. We heard this same foundational discourse from Zoltán Sulok, the leader of the Organisation of Hungarian Muslims, the largest instance of Muslims in Hungary, as well. One recurrent difference between the discourse of Mihálffy on schools of law and that of the Organisation of Hungarian Muslims is that Mihálffy puts forward the Quran as the reference for rereading the *sharia* while the Organisation of Hungarian Muslims insists on the prophetic tradition as the reference in law (mainly because the Quran has very few legal instructions).<sup>34</sup> As a consequence of this difference, the Organisation of Hungarian Muslims promotes a more traditionalist Islam while Mihálffy endorses an ecumenical-liberal Islam, although the two discourses share a belief in the same sources of *sharia*. Another difference is that while both discourses believe *sharia* is flexible, the Organisation of Hungarian Muslims trusts the Muslim clerics. Mihálffy, in all our conversations with him, avoids any statement regarding the current legal Muslim authorities.

#### 4. Accounting anthropologically for “ecumenical *sharia* for Europe”

Similar to other discourses, practices, claims and appropriations of *sharia* in Europe, Mihálffy’s *sharia* project needs to be accounted for anthropologically to grasp its social and cultural meanings. A recent important discussion by Timothy P. Daniels paves the way to such understanding. Daniels suggests moving beyond the dichotomy of interpretive frameworks vs. discursive practice. The current debate in the anthropology of Islam opposes the constructivist narrative of interpretive frameworks which maintains that “the ideas, feelings, practices, interpretations, and discourses of Muslims are to be studied as *Islams* since there is no single real or essentialist Islam based in religious texts, Islamic history and the practices of exemplary individuals. These diverse kinds of Islam are produced in society, and embodied by individuals from various backgrounds”<sup>35</sup>. A second approach, championed by Talal Asad, claims that Islam is a discursive tradition that “includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Quran and *hadith*. This heterogeneous tradition has a past that articulates with present conditions, practices and institutions and instructs Muslims of the purposes and proper performance of practices”.<sup>36</sup> Daniels proposes a synthesis that views “Islamic texts as embo-

33 Interview with Balázs Mihálffy.

34 Interview with Zoltán Sulok. conducted by the authors of the present article

35 DANIELS 2017. 2.

36 DANIELS 2017. 3.

died with knowledge from which particular Muslims and collectivities construct diverse mental representations".<sup>37</sup> This approach could do justice to the importance of religious texts for believers in Islam, which makes Muslims today specific among religious believers.<sup>38</sup> As he puts it "recognizing that the Quran and hadith and related textual sources embody knowledge is especially relevant to the study of *sharia*, because Muslims, directly or indirectly, look to these sources as a basis for the understandings of divine directives. Second, Muslims drawing upon knowledge embedded in religious texts, form diverse mental representations, cultural models, and embodied practices, producing a variety of local *Islam*s".<sup>39</sup>

*Sharia* claims are certainly mental representations of a traditional knowledge embedded with specific norms (absoluteness, universality, etc.) as they are, at the same time, local productions of particular contexts and social agents. There is, however, a third variable to be taken into account in understanding the relevance of *sharia* claims today: that of moral economy. The latter answers the question of "why", ignored by the two major narratives in the anthropology of Islam as well as by Daniels' synthesis. *Sharia* claims are a capital believed to make social miracles, for the community and for the elite that leads the way. These claims emerged in the Muslim world, within semi-urban populations frustrated by the failure of post-colonial "socialist" miracles, looking for a better life and a final miracle, turning to Islamist claims of *sharia* as the saviour.

In Asia (including the Gulf countries), this moral economy as described by Patricia Sloane-White promotes "a version of Islam that is increasingly conservative, financially and fiscally powerful, and committed to social control over Muslim and non-Muslim public and private lives."<sup>40</sup> In Europe, marginalized Muslim populations came to believe in the same project, hoping it could bring about a favourable change in their social conditions. It is no surprise that the two most visible, debated and researched aspects of *sharia* in Europe are family law (the basic unit of moral economy) and Islamic finance. Thus, Mihálffy could be right in that *sharia* claims are expected to stay, if not to thrive, as they are an "authentic" resource of empowerment for Muslims in Europe, although very few non-Muslims would be persuaded to join the *sharia* claims (unless they see some benefit in it).

Another anthropological account of *sharia* claims in Europe could be labelled the pluralistic account, widely spread and endorsed by many scholars of Islamic law, especially by John Bowen, one of the leading anthropologists of Islam today. Bowen considers the social basis of *sharia* claims to be "the broad middle group of Muslims who are moderately conservative in their religious orientation... a broad middle group or 'the community of the middle way'".<sup>41</sup> He believes that in the British context, "being 'ruled by *shari'a*' has become a sort of symbolic good thing for some Muslims".<sup>42</sup> Bowen mobilizes two other notions to account for *sharia* cla-

37 DANIELS 2017. 3.

38 DANIELS 2017. 4.

39 DANIELS 2017. 4.

40 SLOANE-WHITE 2017. 192.

41 BOWEN *et al.* 2013. 3.

42 BOWEN *et al.* 2013. 7.

ims. First, he mobilizes the notion of public interest, *maṣlaḥa*. As he puts it “here is an example of a step that would work to the benefit of Muslims, and since Islam is here to do that, then we should consider this question of *maṣlaḥa*, or social welfare or social benefit, as we think about the various decisions. So it is central, and it is a notion that many Muslims, including those who have expertise in the traditional *fiqh*, the jurisprudential tradition, apply all the time, often in combination with reasoning that is within their particular legal school”.<sup>43</sup>

Second, Bowen has recourse to the liberal notion of public reasoning, “looking at actors drawing on different traditions, trying to converge on a set of goals – and here we go back to my general pragmatist approach to these issues – and who are coming at them from different normative stances. They indeed refer to divergent sets of norms, it may be human rights, it may be the texts of Islam, it may be particular laws in particular countries, Christian ethics or something else.”<sup>44</sup>

Our perspective of the moral economy, discussed above, resonates with Bowen’s idea about *sharia* as a symbolic good for the British Muslims, and the reasons that led to setting up a solid social basis for it within the Muslim communities. Furthermore, Mihálffy would agree with Bowen’s liberal public reasoning and the opportunity it provides to *sharia*-minded people to translate *sharia* terms and norms into a liberal legal discourse. It is the notion of *maṣlaḥa* which could be problematic, here. Mihálffy also uses this notion to render the meaning of public interest for all, not only for Muslims. It makes, however, no doubt for scholars of Islamic law that *maṣlaḥa* is understood by the majority of Muslim lawyers to be inherent to the law itself or consequent to it, and although it is a pragmatist notion, it does not mean that it directs law-making unless the traditions are silent over the matter at hand. This is an old debate, still unresolved in the Muslim world, between texts and interests, especially with regard to the eventual contradiction between the two, and the possible options Muslims could have. Most Muslim lawyers would answer definitively that the priority should be given to the texts. This is not the outcome one would expect in a liberal democracy.

A third narrative may be classified as a cautious postmodernist narrative suggested by Adam Possamai, a Belgian sociologist of religion. The latter advocates a “multi-faith pragmatic approach” to *sharia* in the West:

“between a traditional modernist and universal view of the law and a postmodern and legal pluralist view: that of a pragmatic multiple modernist project, recognising formal agreements and recommendation for more accountability rather than for any formalised sub-legal institutions. This thesis of multiple modernities with regard to *sharia* and legal pluralism, progressed from simply admitting that religion is part of the public sphere, to now attempting to understand what this means and what we are to do with this new social reality”.<sup>45</sup>

43 BOWEN *et al.* 2013. 5.

44 BOWEN *et al.* 2013. 15.

45 POSSAMAI 2015. 300-301.

Whereas a post-modern legal setting could be open to *sharia* claims, at least in specific matters, and within the scope of reasonable accommodations, the few voices of reformed *sharia* have not yet convinced the large sectors of Muslims to seriously engage with modernity. A recent article by the anthropologist Jonathan Benthall sees the solution for the problem of *sharia* in the West in “emulating Nineteenth Century Judaism in Europe. In the same vein Reform Judaism brought the modernist rabbis together around the ideas of acceptance of other religious perspectives, rejecting dietary restrictions and the idea of a Jewish nation in a favour of a religious community”.<sup>46</sup> We could not avoid the comparison with Judaism as Mihálffy told us that so far the most enthusiastic reaction he had to his project came from eminent intellectuals in Israel. This reaction prompted him to pursue his rapprochement with the Jewish intellectuals, a perspective he did not think about while putting together his 2428-page Quran commentary. With this rapprochement, Mihálffy hopes to initiate a genuine ecumenism.

## Conclusion

The purpose of the current paper was to determine the possibilities of ecumenism in the current Muslim landscape in Europe. The study has shown through the case of Balázs Mihálffy, a Hungarian Muslim intellectual, that a comprehensive reform project around a *sharia* claim can be both a resource for ecumenism as well as a limit to it. The research has also shown that a transnational life project with different religious platforms could sustain a claim of ecumenism. Overall, this study strengthens the idea that a reformed *sharia* necessitates a critical engagement with the sources of Islam, a considerable will to transgress the moral and social precincts of the so-called Muslim communities in Europe, as well as a preference for everyday Islam over traditionalist Islam. Mihálffy uses selected tools of Islamic law and Western legal and political philosophy to foster his project: Quran commentary, diversification of legal tools, liberal public reasoning, etc. The most important limitation lies in the fact that Mihálffy faces obstacles in creating a network and gaining the support of the current legal Muslim authorities working in Europe, the majority of whom are traditionalist. He admits that these authorities, whether Sunni or Shiite, care more about political interests of their countries of origin and their scholastic traditions than about reforming *sharia*. Another limitation is the incapacity of Muslim Hungarians, in terms of structure and discourse to offer him the opportunity to carry on his reform project. Finally, his *sharia*-embedded-as-law or law-embedded-as-*sharia* could be ambiguous for European legal experts, coming from a tradition with a corpus and logic radically different from those the Muslim legal tradition puts forward in its *sharia*-claims.

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46 BENTHALL 2015.

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## “WHO PLACED THE JEWS IN THE BOURGEOIS STRATUM OF THE STATE”

### LOYALTIES, DISCOURSES AND WORLD-VIEWS IN HUNGARIAN JEWISH SYMBOLIC POLITICS BEFORE 1944<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The study examines the question of veneration of the king, confessionization and state patriotism in the Jewish denominational press before 1944 through the example of the attitude towards the ruler and the authorities of the Jewish communities interpreting themselves in the historical life-world of the diaspora. The life-worlds of the Monarchy experienced on a denominational basis fundamentally determined the experiences, possibilities for action, interpretations, discourse tradition and perspectives of their members. In the case of the Jews the ways in which denominational discourse traditions were shaped and the ways of relating to the broader social environment were influenced by the traditions of Judaism, the possibilities and limitations of the changing society, and by the appearance of modern ideals of nation.

**Keywords:** Habsburg, Jew, civil religion, state patriotisms, veneration of the king

“Musing on the past, what we first feel is inexpressible gratitude to Francis Joseph I and Charles IV, crowned kings of Hungary and even earlier to Joseph II, uncrowned Hungarian ruler, under whom the Jews won human and civil rights and who placed the Jews in the bourgeois stratum of the state.”<sup>2</sup>

The quotation in the title appeared in 1939 in *Orthodox Zsidó Újság* [*Orthodox Jewish Newspaper*], the organ of the Budapest Orthodox Jewish denomination, in an interpretation of news of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Jewish Law. However, the strategy reflected in the news item pointed beyond the discourses of the denominational trend and also represented the discourse and symbolic politics characteristic of Neology. The continuation of the lines in the motto recalled the emblematic liberal politicians of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, who figured in the leading article as benefactors of the Jews. At the same time the reality of the Horthy era – with

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1 The author is an external associate of the MTA – SZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture (03 217).

2 *Orthodox Zsidó Újság*, 10 May 1939 / 1–2. Egy fővárosi falragasz előtt. [Contemplating a notice on a wall in Budapest]



its discourses in a “kuruc” spirit,<sup>3</sup> its anti-Semitic phenomena and the symbolic gestures that the supreme governing power expected – was always present in the Hungarian Jewish denominational press and in the texts of synagogue homiletics that shaped public thinking. The gestures in the field of symbolic politics made by the Jewish press are noteworthy when seen from the angle of the history of Jewish political thinking, the question of hierarchies of loyalty, and the blending of elements of the pre-modern and modern world-views. How thin is the borderline on which the conflicting symbolic political discourses move? How are pre-modern, irrational models thinking in terms of a created world and models operating as rational organised around the modern notion of progress and natural law combined into an integral whole? What can the symbolic practices express at the level of the texts and community rites?

### **At the borderline between feudal and modern national social systems**

The emancipation of the Jews occurred at the borderline between the feudal and the modern national social systems, and at the encounter of world-views determined by revelation and by the enlightened notion of progress. The relationship of the Jews to royal power was determined by the traditions of Judaism,<sup>4</sup> while the notion of equality and becoming part of the modern European nations was based on the Jewish enlightenment.<sup>5</sup> Within this frame of interpretation for example Frances Joseph, especially in the process of succession, was compared to Moses leading the Jews out of servitude, and Charles IV to Joshua leading them to the promised land and the attainment of equality.<sup>6</sup> The texts revealed the essential features of these things and made use of readily understandable biblical comparisons.

Among the Jews in Hungary in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the rites of Judaism linked to feudal traditions (laudes, intrada, blessing the crowned ruler, prayer for the king) were present simultaneously with modern national symbolic politics and modes of argument. In the same way, both the rational and irrational elements in the traditions of Judaism formed by the chain of generations and the Enlightenment with its rationalism and aspirations to transform society were present in the world-view of the representatives of reforms. The ruler and state power was a power legitimised by God, and the Eternal appeared in Hungarian Jewish symbolic politics as the active shaper of His people’s fate.

The parallel presence and in cases the intertwining of different models for interpretation of the world could be observed in the area of the relationship of

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3 A concept that has its roots in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century Principality of Transylvania, that was given new relevance in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century within the frames of the modern constitutional monarchy and the Hungarian national ideal. It comprised opposition to the Habsburgs, and Protestant anti-Catholicism, the latter as a symbolic criticism of the power constellation within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

4 DUBIN 2014, GLÄSSER 2016, KOMORÓCZY 2012a. 159, 332.

5 DUBIN 2005

6 GLÄSSER 2016, GLÄSSER 2017.

the community to the authorities. The power symbolism of the feudal world had its place in religious eschatologies,<sup>7</sup> it translated its legitimations into the basic stories of religious memory. The Jewish self-interpretation of the secular world and its relationship to the local authorities can also be understood from the basic stories of Judaism of the secular world, in the centre of which were the interpretations of *galuth*.<sup>8</sup> The Jews reinterpreted the mediaeval Jewish institution of “servant of the royal chamber” as a form of service to the king where the Jews were not servants of the king’s servants but free people under the protection of the king.<sup>9</sup> According to the teachings of Judaism the crowned head is a pale reflection in this world of the glory of the Creator of the World.<sup>10</sup>

### Sources and practices shaping attitudes

The denominational relationship towards the supreme state power can be observed not only in homiletics with the intention of shaping attitudes and at the level of the press. It also appeared in the normative system of denominational community frames. In Csongrád for example, after a repeated case in which members of the religious community did not stand during the prayer to be said for the ruler, on 14 July 1883 the matter was discussed, and it was set down in the minutes that those present were required to stand in the synagogue during the prayer said by the cantor for king and country (*Hanoten teshua*).<sup>11</sup>

Another case from the south of the Great Plain also illustrates the social influence of homiletics, inauguration speeches and symbolic political rites: the scandal and reprisal arising from the inauguration of the cemetery monument in Szeged for Jewish First World War heroes. In the anti-Semitic public discourse of the Horthy era the inauguration speech made by Dr vitéz Kálmán Shvoy on heroism independent of denomination evoked a negative press response in Budapest from the authorities and led to the forced retirement of the all-arms brigade commander.<sup>12</sup> Historical research is unable to empirically and representatively establish the individual perception of listeners hearing the homilies, participants in religious services or monument inauguration ceremonies, in the same way as it cannot show how readers of the denominational press interpreted its texts, but it would be over-hasty to question their influence in shaping community attitudes.

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7 See: LÖWITZ 1996.0

8 SINGER 1907. 17–18, 118–119.

9 DUBIN 2014. 57–58.

10 SINGER 1907. 210–211.

11 Archive of the Szeged Jewish Religious Community, Csongrád material, 1884–1920, Community minutes, taxation. Vol. 4. “Minutes No. 7”, (14 July 1883) p[oint] 20. I wish to thank Péter Illés who drew my attention to the case.

12 For more details, see: GLÄSSER – GLÄSSERNÉ NAGYILLÉS 2015.

## Dualities spanning historical periods

In Neolog cultural memory 1848 is the symbol of the melding together of the modern Hungarian nation. Although the symbolic politics of independence appeared in Jewish public discourse, it was not directed against Francis Joseph but was intended to express belonging to the Hungarian nation within a system of multiple loyalties. The "*kuruc*"-type national and the royalist state patriotic discourse were present side by side in the Neolog and Orthodox press throughout the period. Nevertheless, in the case of conflicting loyalties, respect for the king legitimated by religious models prevailed. Before the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 mainly religious models predominated: respect for the king and Talmudic respect for laws of the state that were not directed against the Jewish religion. This is corroborated by the example of Leopold Löw regarded as an enthusiastic supporter of the Hungarian struggle for independence and of Magyarisation: before 1859 the rabbi who called for Hungarian-language rhetoric in the synagogue published in German two of his speeches on Francis Joseph and also wrote verse in Hebrew about the ruler.<sup>13</sup> It should also be mentioned here that following the assassination attempt by Libényi motivated by national sentiment for Hungarian independence, a whole series of services for the recovery of the ruler were held in synagogues, including one led by Leopold Löw, chief rabbi of Szeged.<sup>14</sup>

After the Compromise the figure of Francis Joseph was judged in the context of the question of constitutionality and the rabbis and Jewish publicists in Hungary adopted the position of the 1867 Compromise.<sup>15</sup> With the Enlightenment and the emergence of modern political civil consciousness, Jewish synagogue speeches reflecting on major events of the majority national history and adaptations of the symbolic politics of the surrounding world within the frame of Judaism also appeared. On the name day and birthday of the ruler, and at religious services as part of the rites for anniversaries in the life of the ruling family the synagogue sermons of many rabbis reflected on similarities in Holy Scripture and in the events of the Compromise.

Jewish symbolic politics always combined different traditions. On the one hand it saw the role of the ruler and the relationship of the Jews to the ruler as part of the created world in which the Eternal appeared as an active participant in the present, the shaper of his people's fate. On the other hand, natural law, the notion of progress and the secular eschatology of seeking the betterment of society was to be found behind the public discourse on Jewish enlightenment, equal rights and belonging to the Hungarian nation.

According to historians' models of 19<sup>th</sup> century social changes, the modern individualist citizen placed himself in the centre of his world, as a result God and transcendence could be present there only as the individual's subjective, personal relationship to God and as part of the tradition behind the person. The God who

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13 KOMORÓCZY 2012b. 40.

14 BÁNYAI 2017.

15 See: GLÄSSER 2016

actively imbued and explained the world was gradually forced into the background. In modern society politics took over the role of explaining and holding together the world that had been played by religion in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age. Atheism began to spread as a new phenomenon.<sup>16</sup> Up to the autumn of 1918 Neolog homiletics and publicistics did not reflect these trends; if they mentioned them at all it was – similarly to Orthodox publicistics – within the frame of the problem of indifference to religion. However, this change in the world-view was clearly reflected in the transformation of power structures that followed the collapse after the First World War. Among the changes in power and in part also in personnel, the shifting frames and self-reflections, *Egyenlőség* was the first to break the social narrative determining loyalty to the king. Dr Ernő Ballagi, a lawyer who joined the staff of the paper in 1915 – and served mainly as defence lawyer for *Egyenlőség* in press cases – felt the need for historical/denominational confirmation of the change in the form of the state during the bourgeois revolution of 1918.<sup>17</sup> For Miksa Szabolcsi – the editor-in-chief who died in 1915 – it was Francis Ferdinand’s portrait that was a mobilising force in the state patriotic symbolism of the war, while for Ballagi<sup>18</sup> who belonged to the generation socialised after reception, it was the change in the state form that represented denominational confirmation. In Ballagi’s narrative the king was no longer the crowned head ruling by grace of God but had become an individual embodying supreme state power who could be directed towards a goal and influenced by groups representing corporate interests in the social space (for example, the Christian Socialists or the anti-Semites). And the non-Jewish kingdoms of the Diaspora are not part of the punishing-rewarding God’s Messianistic plan for the Jews, but in the secular eschatology of the revolutions building on the ruins of the past in the name of progress, they are representatives of state forms that have lost their legitimacy that will be replaced through human will and actions by a utopistic state realised in this world in the present that will bring salvation for the whole of mankind.<sup>19</sup> Ballagi reinterpreted the religious mission of Judaism as a secular political programme, at a time when the denomination was seeking its place in the new structure. In this way no transition or continuity can be found at the level of the determining social narratives. The only common point between the early and the new narratives was the positive memory of Francis Joseph who gave the denomination equal rights. For Ballagi the historical “negotiation” of royal power became the separation of the practice of Jewish loyalty to the king from the revolutionary present. In this way Ballagi’s practice of remembrance fitted perfectly into the remembrance canons of the new elites criticising the Monarchy.<sup>20</sup>

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16 KAPITÁNY – KAPITÁNY 2007. 383–384.

17 *Egyenlőség* 16 November 1918 / 1–2. Zsidóság és köztársaság. [Jews and republic] [Written by: Dr. Ernő Ballagi]

18 See: SELTMANN 2000. 81.

19 See: LÖWITZ 1996.

20 See: ROMSICS 2004. 58, 62–97.

A radically different practice characterised Jewish symbolic politics in Hungary in the interwar years. The period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy appeared as a positive time in the remembrance canon of both the Neolog and the Orthodox press. The person of the ruler – Francis Joseph and Charles IV – was judged similarly. The age of the two emperor-kings became a symbol in the time between the two world wars. This was clearly reflected in the Orthodox organisation's Budapest paper: by 1930 the time of Francis Joseph had become a lost golden age.<sup>21</sup>

The new dominant narrative in Central Europe was “national self-realisation” that led to the creation of new remembrances and new historical canons adapted to state frames. In the newly created collective historical consciousnesses memory of the dynastic past became the antithesis of the national-folk present that had won its independence. As Gergely Romsics has pointed out, positive judgement of the Dualist past characterised only the memoirs of the old elite.<sup>22</sup> After the First World War the national strategy of the Hungarian opinion-forming elite regarding the Jews also changed. The earlier assimilative concept of nation was replaced by the ethnicist strategy. Law No. XXV of 1920 highlighted the change in the concept of nation. Because of the new frames the age of the Monarchy became a world increased in value denominationally. In the Horthy era anti-Habsburg, independence discourse shifted into the mainstream and even *Egyenlőség* was unable to escape its influence.<sup>23</sup> The new Hungarian elite settled the question of royal power in two laws. Law No. I of 1920 temporarily settled the question of supreme state power, and then on 1 March 1921 the national assembly elected Miklós Horthy governor. After Charles IV's two attempts to return, Law No. XLVII of 1921 declared “the termination of the rights as ruler of His Majesty Charles IV and as heir to the House of Habsburg”. However, this did not influence symbolic politics and the division of society: the debate over legitimist vs. free election of a king continued, just as an image emerged of Horthy as a traitor and usurper.<sup>24</sup> Following Charles IV's second attempt to return *Egyenlőség*, in line with the new political reality of power, interpreted the king's attempted return as an attack on the governorship as the basic institution of the new political structure and its publicists stressed the Jew loyal to the existing regime.<sup>25</sup> Rather than legitimism looking to Otto Habsburg as King Otto II, what can be seen in the Jewish press is a passive loyalty at the level of remembrance history of the institution in contrast to its present, expressed in the form of a nostalgic evocation of the past.

Together with the change in the concept of nation, the Jewish press also reacted to the conflict with the authorities of the rabbi most influential in Hungarian

21 GLÄSSER – ZIMA 2015.

22 ROMSICS 2004.

23 ZIMA 2016. 445.

24 On the image of Horthy as traitor and dethroner, see: ROMSICS 2005. 222–225.

25 See: ZIMA 2016. 450; Fiziker concludes, on the basis of the memoirs of Lajos Szabolcsi *Két emberöltő. Az Egyenlőség két évtizede (1881–1931)* [*Two Generations. Two decades of Egyenlőség (1881–1931)*] that the leading article written by Pál Sándor, Labour Party representative on the subject of the attempted return must have been removed by the censor. FIZIKER 2016. 90.

Neolog Jewish symbolic politics, the trial of Immanuel Löw for *lèse-majesté* against the governor<sup>26</sup> and his detention in house arrest. The denominational judgement of the governor can probably be seen reflected in later liturgical practice. In a study of prayer books in the successor states of the Habsburg Monarchy, Damohorská showed that the *Hanoten teshua* prayer texts were also modified after the First World War. In a number of cases the prayers said for the ruler and for the dignity of the state were either replaced by texts that did not contain concrete names or the pre-war texts were published in unchanged form with a reference to the frames of the earlier political reality that did not mention names.<sup>27</sup> The prayer books in Hungary replaced the prayer to be said for king and country with a prayer for the prosperity of the country, without reference to the governor as supreme power. For example, *Fohász [Prayer]* the prayer book for women written by Ferenc Hevesi and Simon Hevesi contained a prayer asking for wisdom and understanding in the hearts of those who handle the affairs of the country.<sup>28</sup> József Schön's *machzor* published in the Király Street printing house of Joseph Schlesinger in Budapest in 1922, in the Hebrew text for the last two days of Pesach prayed for Francis Joseph I and Amalia Eugenia. In the Hungarian translation the names had been removed.<sup>29</sup> In the wake of celebration of the king's birthday, it also became the general practice to hold spectacular celebrations for the birthday of the person representing supreme state power: prime minister or governor.<sup>30</sup> In Hungary Miklós Horthy's birth jubilees were celebrated,<sup>31</sup> in Hungary the last solemn service – not on a round anniversary – was held with a prayer by Chief Rabbi Ferenc Hevesi in 1944 in the Heroes' Temple in Budapest during the time of the deportations from country towns.<sup>32</sup>

In the Horthy era, among the rulers and statesmen held up as positive examples of Christian society, the Orthodox and Neolog view of history gave broad scope not only to the old state patriotic discourse but also to the discourse of Hungarian national independence: the tolerance of the Habsburgs, the myth of the 1848 independence struggle and the cult of Kossuth and Rákóczi were present simultaneously. Articles, feuilletons and recollections appeared with titles such

26 “Sándor Bottka, police chief of Szeged, ordered the arrest of Immanuel Löw on 20 April 1920 on suspicion of *lèse-majesté* against the governor. He was first imprisoned in the prosecution cell on the upper floor of the “palace of justice”, the court building in Széchenyi Square. In early May he was transferred to the prosecution's “branch prison” in the Star Prison, then on 12 July released into house arrest in his home at Korona (since 1945 Hajnóczy) Street No. 8. Following the clemency order by Governor Miklós Horthy the house arrest was terminated on 11 June 1921.” PÉTER 2004. 84; see also HIDVÉGI 1996.

27 DAMOHORSKÁ 2010. 118, 127–128.

28 HEVESI – HEVESI 1930. 543.

29 SCHÖN 1922. 512– [513].

30 See: DAMOHORSKÁ 2010. 121–123.

31 *A Magyar Zsidók Lapja* 7 March 1940 / 2. Hálaadó ünnepi istentisztelet a Kormányzó jubileumán a dohányutcai templomban. [Solemn service of thanksgiving in Dohány Street Synagogue on the Governor's jubilee.] This was adapted to the general frame, similarly to Christian prayer texts and services for the king / ruler. On Jewish occasions, see: TURBUCZ 2015. 126–127.

32 KOMORÓCZY 2012a. 890.



as *Francis Joseph I and Orthodoxy*.<sup>33</sup> Sándor Gábel wrote a piece recalling Francis Joseph's visit to Nagyvárád.<sup>34</sup> The aristocratic passion for collecting that also extended to antiques of Judaism acquired a hint of polemical meaning in face of present reality. This was reflected among others in the title: *From the good old world... – Hebrew poem in the library of Francis Joseph*.<sup>35</sup> These were topoi – that for the most part had already appeared in the Jewish denominational press in the period of Dualism – found on dynastic and national anniversaries and celebrations, and also in the columns of the papers with an updated message at a time when the Jews were under attack. And in the press reaction to the Jewish laws, loyalty to the dynasty and nostalgia for the monarchy again came to the fore as positive counter-examples from the national past.

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Rabbi Akiva Sofer said blessing on Franz Josef I on his official visit to Pressburg [Pozsony] in 1909

## PHISHING, SUPERSTITION OR HEALING PRAYER?

### CHAIN LETTERS ON THE INTERNET<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** In this study I analyse chain letters with a religious content spreading on the internet, by e-mail and on social media. On the basis of content, they can be sorted in separate groups: they transmit prayers, beautiful and instructive stories, wisdoms, and sometimes messages from heaven. In their promises too, they focus mainly on the accumulation of spiritual benefits (they will pray for those who forward the message, they will think of them, they will send them positive energy). In my analysis I examine the genre forerunners of the source group (letters from heaven, sacred letters), and their latest variants that are transmitted in the form of presentation letters. The main question I raise is whether the chain letters are really only well written, persuasive texts that are easy to forward thanks to the technical possibilities of the internet. Or is the forwarding motivated by a belief that the associated positive promises or threats will come true? Or could it be a desire to influence the future, and the rites associated with this? My initial hypothesis is that this is a writing practice with centuries of tradition and the associated beliefs are also ancient. Even if the knowledge they contain sometimes becomes a means for phishing.

**Keywords:** religious chain letter, letters from heaven, digital folklore, prayer, superstition

The internet is now the principal means of communication.<sup>2</sup> It has become an integral part of everyday life and has changed the forms and habits of maintaining contact both in the world of work and in private life.<sup>3</sup> For this reason it cannot escape the attention of folkloristics either.<sup>4</sup> In this study I examine a group of folklore texts, religious chain letters, that have found new possibilities and forms in internet communication.

One of the main ways in which the internet is used is to write e-mail messages.<sup>5</sup> The religious chain letters to be analysed here most often reach the reader through this channel. However, we also often hear in connection with them the warning:

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1 MTA-SZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture

2 DOMOKOS 2013, 292.

3 KIBBY 2005, 770.

4 There have been many studies on the subject in the literature in recent years; I refer here to only a few basic works. BLANK 2007, 15-26.; BLANK 2009; BLANK 2012; KRAWCZYK-WASILEWSKA 2016; DOMOKOS 2013, 292-313; VARGHA 2016, 624-634; LAJOS 2016, 292-320.

5 KIBBY 2005, 770.

"Do not forward!" or "Delete immediately!" Behind these warnings is the opinion that the chain letters are launched with the purpose of collecting data, they unnecessarily burden the mail systems, and they spread fake news. To achieve these aims the authors of these letters follow well-structured patterns of persuasion, encouraging even doubters to forward the messages.<sup>6</sup> As a result we all regularly find such letters in our mailbox, proving that people forward them in spite of the warnings. Most of the chain letters<sup>7</sup> with religious subjects (28 in all) examined in the present analysis arrived in my own main system between 2012 and 2016. For the most part they came from my wider circle of friends with a wide range of attitudes, from deeply religious people (among them, from a Catholic priest) to openness to alternative religious phenomena. Often, of course, the letters were addressed to me as an ethnologist with an interest in vernacular culture, but mainly they were sent with the purpose of involving me in the chain of correspondents. All this raises the question of whether these are in fact only well written, persuasive texts that – thanks to the technical possibilities of the internet – are easy to forward. Or does the belief that the positive promises or threats associated with forwarding with come true motivate the sending? Could it be the desire to influence the future and the rites associated with this? My own initial assumption is that this is a writing practice with centuries of tradition and the also related ancient beliefs, even if in cases the knowledge in them becomes a means for phishing. I wish to support this conclusion with an analysis of the chain letters presented.

In this study I shall analyse here only the letters with a religious content from the source group of chain letters covering a wider thematic area<sup>8</sup>. It is these letters that show most continuity with the centuries-old custom of writing chain letters.

Basically, this is a corpus of texts that belong together at a pragmatic level but are heterogeneous. They include prayers, messages from heaven received in visions, pious stories and pearls of wisdom. Nevertheless we can treat them as a unit because of the similarities of meaning, the identical function and their occurrence in the concrete communication situation (correspondence via the internet).<sup>9</sup> I ana-

6 MARINOV – DEZSŐ – PÁL 2006; SCHIRM 2008, 72.

7 Chain letters are letters in which the sender asks the recipient to forward the message to a specified number of persons, thereby involving an ever-wider circle of readers and senders. Generally, some kind of positive promise is linked to the forwarding, backed by a story giving credibility to the promise. Failure to forward the message (breaking the chain) is associated with some kind of misfortune. Often the letter also contains a story supporting this. DÉGH 2001, 189; DUNDES 1966, 14–19; DUNDES – PAGTER 1992, 3–5; HOPPÁL 1998, 75; SCHIRM 2008, 72.

8 The thematically broadest overview of chain letters can be found on Daniel W. Van Arsdales website and in the chain letter database to which it provides a link (online access: [http://www.silcom.com/~barnowl/chain-letter/evolution.html#s1-2motivational\\_categories](http://www.silcom.com/~barnowl/chain-letter/evolution.html#s1-2motivational_categories), accessed on: 14. 02. 2017). He classifies the letters in the following categories: 1. Protection 2. Charity 3. Religion 4. Luck 5. Advocacy 6. Money 7. Parody 8. Exchange 9. World Record 10. Chain Email. Marjorie D. Kibby distinguishes letters with similar themes: holding out the prospect of money; letters of friendship (that make the reader feel good); warning of business scams; warning of a terrible effect; petitions; unusual stories. KIBBY 2005, 779–780.

9 Incantations or spells constitute another heterogeneous but pragmatically cohesive corpus of texts. In the case of this genre too, we can observe that "the same function in a given concrete speech situation merges and intertwines the different formal solutions of incantations and prayer." Pócs 2014, 17.

lysed a total of 25 letters that I classified into four main types: 1. Messages promising divine blessing, 2. Threats, messages of warning from God, 3. "Effective" prayer texts and images, 4. Texts containing wisdoms.

My aim was not to discredit, to enlighten, or a confrontation with the accepted Catholic position.<sup>10</sup> Rather, I wanted to understand what kind of beliefs appear in these texts. Can they be identified? To what extent are the contents of these beliefs traditional or innovative? Can these letters be interpreted as a kind of divination technique, that is, as a means of influencing the future? How is religious, spiritual contemplation connected in them with future well-being and spiritual equilibrium? In examining the letters, I also seek to identify the ideas on which the texts are built. Are they based on religious experience or do they use fake news regarded as superstition to induce the reader to forward them? Another question to be answered is the role played by the media in transmitting these superstitions and how the functions of the mass communications means influence the content and form of the chain letter genre. In the following I answer these questions.

## I. Continuity and innovation

### 1. Religious texts of a chain letter nature in the past

Texts with religious content written as chain letters are not unknown as correspondence and everyday writing practice. In the literature they are known as *Letters from Heaven* (*Himmelsbriefe*). They contain a revelation in writing, a message or prayer text from a divine being, and are presented in the form of a letter.<sup>11</sup> The roots of the genre must be sought in the period in which the Bible originated, as confirmed by the motif of a letter of divine origin that occurs numerous times in the Bible.<sup>12</sup> Over subsequent centuries there is continuous data from all parts of the world on the practice of copying and forwarding letters, messages, written texts and prayers of this type.<sup>13</sup> There was thus a series of cultural elements

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10 In formulating my goals I drew much inspiration from the introductory lines to the book by Vilmos Keszeg *Hiedelmek, narratívumok, stratégiák* [Beliefs, Narratives, Strategies]. KESZEG 2013, 14.

11 SZOJKA 1990, 184.

12 The Ten Commandments, and the scroll in the Book of Revelation sent to the earth by the angel then eaten by the prophet (Rev. 10, 810) can be considered as such writings of divine origin. For more details, see: Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens (HdA) IV. (1931/1932) *Himmelsbrief* entry, 21–27.

13 In the chapter on *Letters from Heaven* in his database, Daniel W. Van Arsdale mentions Greek, Arab, Armenian, Syrian, Ethiopian, Jewish, even Islamic letters from heaven from different historical periods (online access: <http://www.silcom.com/~barnowl/chain-letter/evolution.html>, accessed on: 14. 02. 2017). Another good overview can be found in: HEIM 1961, 13–20. There is detailed information on the types of heavenly letters that arose in different historical periods in the relevant entries in HdA: HdA IV. 1931/32, *Himmelsbrief* 21–27, HdA VIII. 1936–37, *Sonntagsbrief* 99–104, III. 1930/31, *Grafenamulett* (Count Philip's blessing text, weapon blessing) 1111–1112, VII. 1935/36, *Schutzbrief* 1384–1385, VI. 1931–32, *Ölbergspruch* (weapon blessing) 1246–1247. My attention was drawn to the entries by Emese Szojka's study.

present within the European system of beliefs that conveyed essentially the same message as the chain letter that is still known today.<sup>14</sup>

According to written records, already in the Middle Ages there were prayer texts “that could be carried at all times”, that were probably copied, and their copied variants were used as amulets. The earliest collected text variants came into circulation in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, for the most part as cheap popular prints or hand-written copies; they included the blessing of Tobias, the Seven sacred seals, Saint Michael’s letter, Miraculous image, Sacred letter, the 15 secret sufferings of our Lord Jesus.<sup>15</sup> These were probably used for reading aloud at gatherings, to spread religious knowledge and rules,<sup>16</sup> as prayers said for nine days in states of emergency, or said above the dying for the end of their sufferings and an easier departure into the otherworld.<sup>17</sup> Copying and reading them could also endow these letters with magic power, giving protection from bullets,<sup>18</sup> sickness or harm,<sup>19</sup> or helping to settle disputed cases.<sup>20</sup> There are also sacred or apocryphal letters written by peasant prophets or holy women.<sup>21</sup> In content these are texts of religious exhortation, interpretations of the Bible for believers and non-believers. The heavenly messages, preaching and prayers that they transmit were often copied and passed from hand to hand as vehicles of divine grace, texts bringing spiritual and physical healing.<sup>22</sup>

This brief overview shows that a variety of text groups can be linked to the tradition of writing letters with religious content: prayers, heavenly messages and pious stories about the power of belief to bring good luck and healing. What they have in common is their content encouraging readers to strengthen their individual faith or to perform certain religious actions. They associate this with positive promises related to everyday life or the future (protection in cases of emergency, recovery) or more rarely with threats. Their fulfilment requires the texts to be forwarded, copied or possessed. The good luck chain letter variants that were spread as mail grew out of these texts with religious content.<sup>23</sup>

14 HOPPÁL 1998, 84.

15 BÁLINT 1943, 117–118; BÁLINT 1998, III/375–376; ÚJVÁRY 1980, 477–493; HOPPÁL 1998, 75–86; LENGYEL 2003, 243–256; SZOJKA 1990, 178–191; FÜLÖP 2013, 56–60.

16 They most frequently contain reminders of the Ten Commandments, moral requirements and bans based on the Commandments, and the command to honour the Sabbath. For more details, see: MOLNÁR 1986, 441.

17 SILLING 1992, 373–393.

18 JUNG 1994, 7–17; 18–34.

19 BÁLINT 1943, 117; JUNG 1994, 35–67; SZOJKA 1990, 178–191.

20 LOVÁSZ 2002, 75; SZOJKA 1990, 178–191.

21 The holy letters of a Protestant peasant woman, Mariska Borku living in the Hungarian-inhabited region of today’s Ukraine (Subcarpathia) are well known in Hungarian folklore material, as is the “Eternal Gospel” summing up the visions of another woman from the same region, Borbála Szanyi Mikó. KÜLLÖS-SÁNDOR 2009, Similar apocryphal letters written by a peasant woman have also been collected from the south of the Great Hungarian Plain (Akasztó). RÉTHEY-PRIKKEL (ed.) 2007.

22 KÜLLÖS-SÁNDOR 2009, 32–37.

23 HOPPÁL 1998, 82–84; SZOJKA 1990, 189, ARSHDALE, online access: <http://www.silcom.com/~barnowl/chain-letter/evolution.html>, accessed on: 14. 02. 2017.

## 2. Internet variants

When the internet came into general use for correspondence, the genre gained new impetus as it made copying and forwarding much easier.<sup>24</sup> According to Marjorie Kibby forwarding by e-mail created a greater possibility for the e-mail sender to maintain a distance from the content of the letter. "Forwarding creates an exact duplicate of a message that remains in the mailbox, so the message is in effect not 'passed on'. The information is simply transferred unaltered by any human intervention."<sup>25</sup> In this way the forwarder is in practice not the author of the text. Since detachment reduces responsibility, at the same time this also results in authenticity. This strengthens the printed form (recorded in writing) and this also makes the content more credible for many people.<sup>26</sup> Alan Dundes, the American folklorist who researched the genre, in addition points out that the viability of the chain letter is due not only to the possibility of easy technical reproduction. He gives as an example the story about the origin of chess. We can read in it the ancient desire for a sudden increase in quantity. The Indian wise man who invented chess asked as a reward for as many grains of wheat to be placed on the chessboard according to the following rule: one on the first, two on the second, four on the third, eight on the fourth and so on. It was soon found that this would be more wheat than is grown on Earth, even more than had been produced in the entire history of mankind. Interest in the unexpected magical turn undoubtedly arises from the fact that an insignificant initial number, namely one, in a relatively short time becomes an astronomical figure. In his opinion this desire for sudden growth can be observed in the promises of the chain letters.<sup>27</sup>

The letters with a religious theme also obviously build on this desire, but to assist forwarding they also refer to ancient beliefs and religious experiences. These knowledge contents are effective even in the age of digital media. They make the behaviour of the reader and the forwarder viable and regulate it because they give the letters credibility. In the following I examine these "points of reference", indicating the changes in content, form and style that appear in the digital letter variants.

### II. Points of reference: religious experiences and beliefs

#### 1. The heavenly origin

In the case of the classical sacred letters we could see that they acquired magical function from the fact that they placed their origin in God, the "heavenly ones". They deduced their power of influencing events, averting harm or healing from this heavenly origin. The texts circulating on the internet rarely refer to heavenly

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24 DÉGH 2001, 189–192.

25 KIBBY 2005, 772.

26 KIBBY 2005, 772.

27 DUNDES 1966, 14.



origin (for example: descended from the heavens or sent by Lord Jesus through Saint Michael). At the same time, the messages almost everywhere refer to the origin of the messages from God or Mary:

- “Please read this before you go home, or if you are at home already, read it through now. My name is God”
- “A very urgent request from the Virgin Mary has reached me [...].”
- “God has asked me to tell you [...].”

While in the case of the traditional paper-based chain letters the divine origin means a real (physical) “descending”, the text of internet variants is often said to have originated from oral messages from God or Jesus, or to be the text of visions of apparitions of Mary (Fatima, Medjugorje). The origin is much less tangible as it is based “only” on the oral experience of a vision or private revelation. But it is precisely this that gives the texts their authority. This is why the principle of a link to the Transcendent remains a key component of these modern variants.<sup>28</sup> This is not merely a point of reference; it is also the guarantee of effectiveness.

It is not surprising that chain letters are generated from visions and private revelations. There has been a proliferation on the internet and in the votive objects offered for sale of blogs, websites and publications<sup>29</sup> where the daily updated messages of Jesus and Mary can be read.<sup>30</sup> Messages of this nature come into circulation again and again on the mail systems especially in times of crisis, such as wars. This is not a new element in the genre of chain letters either. Numerous ethnological studies have shown that during wars, for example the First World War and the Serb wars, holy letters encouraging protective religious piety have always become very popular.<sup>31</sup> Armed conflicts in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have led to the reappearance

28 SZOJKA 1990, 187.

29 A few letters of this type available on Hungarian websites: [http://web-hang.hu/maria\\_uzenetei.html](http://web-hang.hu/maria_uzenetei.html), <http://www.medjugorje.hr/hu/medjugorjei-jelenesek/a-szuzanya-uzenetei/>, <http://www.masodikeljovetel.hu/>, accessed on: 22. 06. 2018.

30 One of the most thorough analyses of websites of this nature has been made by the Italian cultural anthropologist Paulo Apolito in his book *The Internet and the Madonna* published in 2005. Through an analysis of the heavenly messages and visions received by the seer Laura Zink living in Bennington, Vermont (USA) he shows how the internet influences representation of the vision phenomenon. He points out that in America in the 1960s efforts to give new impetus to declining religious life led to a sharp rise in the number of visions. This process also had unexpected effects, contrary to the intentions of the Second Vatican Council. A pre-Council atmosphere appeared in certain areas of religious life resulting in a return to certain pre-modern religious practices. The mingling of these practices with the possibilities of modern technologies resulted in a very eclectic group of phenomena in which miracles and the miracles of neo-Baroque religiosity are mixed with the objects and tools of modern telecommunications. The best example of these phenomena is Medjugorje, where the means of mass media played an important role in making it a shrine. Apolito also notes that in his experience technology does not deprive the holy, the Transcendent of all its aspects. Seers find a unique resource in technology and use it to recreate the world, making it possible for certain places, means, objects and persons to become holy again, including some that do not become holy within the frames of institutionalised religion. For more detail, see: APOLITO 2005.

31 This is not a new element in the chain letter genre either. Many ethnological studies have shown that holy letters with religious content have always become more popular during wars, for example the First World War, the Serb wars. See: JUNG 1994, 7–17; SZOJKA 1990, 178–191.



of narratives of this type. One example is a letter dated 5 January 2016 in which the Virgin Mother of Medjugorje warns of an approaching war in the Middle East:

“Prevent the war! The Virgin Mother’s request to the seer Iván  
War is very close! For everyone! The war will begin in the Middle East because of the serious situation and will spread throughout the world. You must prevent it. The whole world must pray every minute! Let the priests open the doors of the churches and invite the people in to pray the rosary and let them pray very hard. Pray, pray, pray. Send this message throughout the world, and above all make it a practice. [...] You must take this message seriously, so that it reaches everyone, and the praying can start.”

As the above example shows, letters of this type generally call for prayer at a specified time, for religious conversion. In exchange they promise that wars will be prevented, evil defeated and the world saved. On the one hand they help the reader to understand the “signs of the times” and on the other they provide a concrete guide to the correct everyday behaviour they consider able to influence phenomena of the world.

## 2. Strong prayers

Many letters are based on the text of familiar or less known prayers, or on the religious experience that the person praying believes that the Transcendent is able to intervene in human life and the natural world around them. This is one of the reasons why they seek possibilities for an encounter with it.<sup>32</sup> One of the most ancient manifestations of this contact or encounter present in all religions is prayer. Through prayer it becomes possible – even if only temporarily – to bridge the gap between the everyday material world and the divine, spiritual world. Besides the religious function, magical, protective functions bringing good luck (such as spells) often become associated with the church’s sacred texts, prayers and experiences of the sacred.<sup>33</sup> Prayers regarded as effective (more effective), that are associated with some kind of additional magic power – protection from bullets, from the plague, that influence birth, a court procedure, the course of a journey – have been present for centuries in our culture. The appearance in chain letters of such prayers with a religious-magical function is not new, the continuity is quite clear. True, the prayers forwarded on the internet are not linked to crisis situations, instead they tend to be linked to a much more general and spiritual type of promises (blessing, grace, peace, happiness) that can give the reader positive reinforcement in the future.<sup>34</sup>

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32 Lovász 2002, 11.

33 Pócs 2014, 15–18.

34 In a survey among a few of my acquaintances, several reported that it is precisely because of these thoughts of a general nature and with a reinforcing content that they forward letters they receive. They say that they send them “if they have a message that could be useful for someone” or “if I have an acquaintance who is sick, and it could help them to believe a little again”.

The letters, especially those that encourage the saying of Our Father and Hail Mary prayers, build on these magical-religious functions: "Say a Hail Mary and turn to the Virgin Mother with a request! [...] When you're down at the lowest point, unable to do anything, God above is planning something for you." It can also be seen that in many cases the prayers are supplemented with promises that make them more effective, like spells:

- "This is a very strong prayer!"
- "Father, take care of and bless those who read this letter."
- "Lord, walk through my house and take away all my anxiety and sickness. I beg you to care for and heal my family. I beg you in your name."
- "Concentrate on the following sentence: The will of God never leads to a place where divine grace does not look after you!"

However, while saying spells is always linked to specified circumstances (human or animal illness, natural catastrophe, against pests, love, etc.), to specified ritual actions (making the sign of the cross, drawing a cross, pouring water, hiding or throwing away objects, etc.), to a consciously determined magical procedure, the appearance of chain letters is always spontaneous. It cannot be said that they involve the conscious and planned influencing of everyday life events. The letters appearing at random in the mail system merely provide the possibility to express our desire or belief that the promise they contain will be fulfilled by forwarding them.

### **3. Encouraging deeper individual spirituality**

It can be observed in practically all of the chain letters examined that they encourage their readers to deepen their spirituality in a way that can be achieved individually or to perform a religious action for this purpose.

- "I want you to spend 30 minutes with me today"
- "In the next 60 seconds stop everything you're doing and take advantage of this opportunity!"
- "Let's bring people together for the rosary prayer on the same day, the same hour, the same minute. All you have to do is say a Pater Noster for the person who sent you this message [...] Secondly, send this message to all your acquaintances! Soon more and more people will pray for you, and you will win over more and more people to pray for each other!"
- "Be still, think and feel the power of God in your life!"
- "Say a Hail Mary and turn to the Virgin Mother with a request!"
- "My children, I am calling you to join together in a great chain in prayer and humility!"

- “Prayer is one of the loveliest acceptable gifts. Trust in the Universe enough to know that you are precisely where you should be. Don’t forget the infinite possibilities that arise from faith. Make use of the endowments you were given, and pass on the love that you have received.”

Appeals to pray, to say the basic prayers, to repeat them nine times are not new elements in the chain letters either. However, the internet variants do not use the imperative mood. Nor do we find concrete punishments and threats held out as a prospect for failure to perform the religious practice.<sup>35</sup> This too helps to bring the reader to forward the letter.<sup>36</sup> The earlier, traditional, paper-based letters also called for the observance of other church rules (attending church on Sunday, confession, the Ten Commandments). Warnings about these have also entirely disappeared from the texts. The authors of the messages call on the reader to perform actions of much more general validity, less bound by the church: pray, be still, meditate, look into yourself, accept different pieces of lifestyle advice. These questions can be clearly understood by persons who do not practice their religion, as well as by those who live outside the scope of the organised church but who nevertheless have a kind of openness to deepening individual spirituality. The infinite diversity of possibilities for spiritual experiences found today indicates that many people are open to and feel a need for such experiences. Paul Zulehner, sociologist of religion, even speaks of a megatrend. Elsewhere we can read of a proliferation of forms offering various spiritual experiences as an alternative to religion.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. Promises and expectations

It is above all the reference to religious-magical experiences, the various promises and expectations raised beside the calls for deeper individual spirituality that give a magical character to the chain letters with a religious content. The expectation that they will be forwarded as a guarantee that they will come true, and the related series of positive and negative promises must be mentioned here. The letters examined hold out the promise of good luck, success, happiness, blessing, peace, the attainment of goals, prosperity, a surprise, and joy for readers who forward them.

<sup>35</sup> Letters originating in the early and mid-19<sup>th</sup> century included very detailed descriptions of terrible punishments and threats (plague, war). For more details, see: LENGYEL 2003, 251–252.

<sup>36</sup> My survey among a few acquaintances found that this did in fact motivate a number of them to forward a letter. However, others reported that “They now contain fewer evil spells and curses. When they still had them, I still forwarded them: you never know, perhaps it was some kind of subconscious fear that made me forward them.”

<sup>37</sup> Knoblauch cites Paul Zulehner in a study in which he draws attention to a distinctive form of the individualisation of religion that is now taking shape, an individual, private belief not linked to a church that he describes by using the concept of spirituality. According to his definition this is a kind of personal reference to God or a Transcendent being. It is focused on individual experience, so that there is no need to believe in a dogma or follow its representatives, but instead to follow one’s own experience. At the same time this experience-orientation leads to the generalisation of charisma, offering a possibility not only to those belonging to the organised churches but potentially to everybody. KNOBLAUCH 2010, 19–34.

- "I didn't get anything I wanted and yet I got everything I needed."
- "Only love me and the blessing is on its way!"
- "You will be successful in all fields and attain your goals!"
- "Our Father walked through my house and took away all my troubles!"

The amulet-like use of the text, the magical elements arising from always keeping them on the person (protection against bullets, help in childbirth, in court cases, in concrete illnesses) have practically disappeared from these electronic text variants. I have in my possession only one letter that makes various promises in connection with an image with miraculous power:

"This image is sacred and works miracles ...

The president of Argentina received this image and thought it was foolishness; 8 days later his daughter died. A man also received this image and immediately forwarded copies of it. The prize was that he won the lotto prize. Alberto Martinez also received this image and gave it to his secretary to make copies of it, but he forgot to distribute them, the woman lost her job and the man his family. This image is sacred and works miracles, don't forget to forward it within 13 days to at least 20 people."

Today's internet messages with a religious content rarely promise greater material prosperity or that money will arrive. The more recent promises mainly keep pace on the intellectual-spiritual level with the countless material goods constantly offered in our daily life.<sup>38</sup> The general values and advice these letters offer mainly reflect the collective fears of our time and the collective desires linked to them.

"Our telephones – are wireless, our stoves – have no flames, our image of the future – is without hope, our life philosophy – is without faith, our babies – have no fathers or mothers, our feelings – are heartless, our education – is without values, our children – have no manners, our churches – have no believers, our peoples – are Godless."

Negative promises also appear in the instructions to forward, as the opposite pair of the associated positive promises, although not so frequently (in three letters):

- "You must forward this within 6 minutes, or you will have an unpleasant surprise. This is true even if you are not superstitious, or in general you have little or no faith."
- "... after he received the letter he forgot about it and a few days later he lost his job"
- "... they forgot to distribute the copies, the woman lost her job, and the man lost his family"

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38 LENGYEL 2003, 252.

Two things can be observed in connection with the promises. One is that the punishments and benefits can be classified in opposite pairs along the lines of success/failure, happiness/unhappiness.<sup>39</sup> It can be seen (although less often nowadays) that fulfilment of the promises made in the letters, that is, the guarantee of their success, is that the letters must be copied in a specified number (10, 12, 20), within a specified time (13 days, 1 day, 1 minute, 30 seconds). Such instructions – to repeat the prayers once, three times, nine times – also appear in spells, making forwarding the letters in the required way similar to the saying of spells.<sup>40</sup> The other thing that can be observed however, is that the majority of today's letter variants are based principally on positive reinforcements of general human values, most often the deepening of religious devotion. These letters dilute the basic formula, depriving them to a certain extent of their magical contents.

## 5. Verificative stories

Most letters contain one or two stories verifying the positive or negative promises associated with their forwarding, reinforcing in the reader that the letter must be forwarded. Stories of this kind have not disappeared from the internet letters either. These can be classified in opposite pairs in the same way as the promises associated with forwarding. The stories giving verification of a positive nature tell how the reader: won the lottery, found a job, experienced something joyful; the stories of negative verification are about death, loss of a job, loss of a family. However, in the majority of the letters the verificative stories contrast the values of the material world with the values of the Transcendent. The former are associated with evil, bad things, death, and the latter with good, life, spiritual peace.

"A young man was preparing for his diploma. For months he had been admiring a beautiful sports car in a showroom, and knowing that his father could afford it, he said that is all he wanted. As the final exam approached the young man waited for his father to buy the car. Finally, on the morning of the exam his father called him into his study and told him how proud he was that he had such a fine son and how much he loved him. He gave him a beautifully wrapped box. Curious, but a little disappointed, the young man unwrapped the box and found in it a leather-bound Bible with his name embossed in gold. Angrily he raised his voice and said to his father: "You have lots of money and you give me a Bible?" he rushed out and left the Bible there. Many years passed, and the young man was very successful in business. He had a lovely home and a wonderful family, but he realised that his father was now very old. He thought that perhaps he should go and visit him. He had not seen him since he graduated. But before he could do anything he received a telegram: his father had died and left all his wealth to him. He needed to come home immediately because he had to make

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39 HOPPÁL 1998, 78–80.

40 HOPPÁL 1998, 79.

arrangements. When he reached his father's home his heart was filled with sorrow and remorse. He began to look through his father's papers and saw that the Bible was just as new as when he had left it there years ago. With tears in his eyes he opened the Bible and began to leaf through it. His father had underlined the following verse: Matthew 7:11. "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" As he read these words a car key fell out of the Bible, the label on it bore the name and address of the dealer where he saw the sports car. There was a date on the label, the day of his exam, and one word ... PAID."

In this binary view of the world the striving for material goods stands opposed to the teachings of the gospels, or simply to the most fundamental human values (love, respect, health).

"[...] You can buy a watch  
But not time;  
You can buy a book  
But not knowledge;  
You can buy a position  
But not respect [...]"

The stories serving as verification offer the reader answers to or strategies for the solution of the desires of our time, the crisis of values and the uncertainties arising from it. In most cases we find that these recommendations are focused on the need to strengthen individual faith and acquire spiritual experiences. In many cases – as part of the persuasion – citing the words of Jesus, simply forwarding the letter appears as a test of the confession of faith.

- "If you believe in God, forward this message!"
- "Please don't be ashamed to follow these instructions! Jesus says: "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."
- "This is a simple test. If you love God and bear witness to the great deeds he performed in his life, send this message to everyone you know and to the person you received it from!"
- "This is a test, do not break it."

Besides encouragement to bear witness, instructions and advice on how to dispel doubt are also an important element of the texts:

- "This message must be taken seriously, please do not throw it out, and I will help you in something you need, the chain of this letter has never been broken, this is not a joke."

- "This is true even if you are not superstitious, if you are not ashamed, send this message [...] you might be angry now, but I thank you all the same, someone thought it foolish, but it turned out not to be, if you can please don't break the chain."
- "He died for you! It's easy to send jokes, images and other foolish things, even pornography in e-mail. BUT you are ashamed to forward anything about God because you are worried about what they will think of your moral views?"

Linda Dégh points out in her analysis that sentences of this type "draw attention to the seriousness of the letter, and by dispelling doubt induce the sender to cooperate".<sup>41</sup> The same purpose is served by the remarks to the reader that it is sufficient to spend a minute in God's presence, to say a prayer, etc., as this reassures the suspicious that they do not have to send money or perform hocus-pocus actions. In the opinion of Mihály Hoppál "this sentence is a classic example of the Freudian slip of the tongue: it says precisely what it wants to leave unspoken. The reference to faith and trust gives a logical frame to all the other claims: it places the constructed world of the examples in the possible world of faith."<sup>42</sup>

The doubt attached to the letters and their content can often be read from the remarks added by the person forwarding them. What we most often find here is an indication that the reader does not believe in such letters, but the instructive and thought-provoking content of the forwarded letter has overridden and induced the reader to forward them.

- "I received this, it has instructive and thought-provoking contents, the rest is not interesting [...] I don't believe in it, but the advice it gives is worth taking!"
- "There is some really beautiful teaching in these words, even if you are not superstitious; perhaps it is not by chance that I received it now, I sent it because [...] just because."
- "I'm not in the habit of sending things like this, but this felt good."

It is precisely these remarks that arouse the greatest suspicion in people who have doubts about the chain letters. What they see is manipulative linguistic elements in the contents cited here and decide against forwarding them on the grounds of their negative belief in phishing.<sup>43</sup>

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41 DÉGH 2001, 191.

42 HOPPÁL 1998, 78.

43 I often find that instead of forwarding the letters, people are forwarding messages with warnings of phishing or virus threats.



### III. Present-day variants – a new genre: presentations with music and images

When the good luck chain letters that had previously circulated on paper appeared on the internet and took advantage of its technical possibilities (easy forwarding, the possibility of wide dissemination, the inclusion of further reinforcing elements: image, sound, music) new variations of the genre arose. It can be seen that they are generating with increasing frequency messages that can be forwarded from visions, the messages of seers, prayer texts, beautiful thoughts, pearls of wisdom, and literary works with religious content. In addition, the texts have assumed a new form: they now appear as presentations with images, sound and music, or they become video clips, giving the message transmitted reinforcement through multiple communication channels. A number of elements of the classical chain letter are missing from these,<sup>44</sup> for example reference to divine origin, stories verifying the commands, threats and prescriptions, the appeal to forward them within a specified time. Only the “Forward” request can be read in the main text. In recent years these letters with music and images have conquered new forums, such as YouTube, Facebook and other similar websites.<sup>45</sup> Here the “Forward” inscription is not essential as these internet forums offer the possibility of sharing. Parallel with this there are fewer and fewer ppt presentations of this type in the mail systems. We are witnessing a full transformation that is resulting in the birth of an entirely new genre. It is also new in its function: the aim is no longer realisation of the positive message dependent on forwarding, or influencing an event, but merely to share spiritual lessons and experiences.

On leaving the mail system further functions became associated with the new type of messages. Anyone can add comments, remarks or feedback. These also indicate that the aim of sharing and forwarding is to assist individual prayer and deeper spirituality.

“Our Father, For You, for us, for everyone! Watch, read, listen with love and send this to everyone in need of prayer and the Lord’s help! I made this video for the victims of the 2010 flood, as an e-mail to be forwarded. But everyone needs or could need Prayer [...] So no matter when the video was made, it will never be out of date!”

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44 Alan Dundes divided the chain letters into four main structural elements: 1. Opening formula that contains a statement indicating that this is a chain letter; 2. Order to forward the letter with precise instructions or an indication of how many times the letter has been around the world; 3. List of verificative cases; 4. List of cases warning of the undesirable consequences that will follow if the letter is not sent. For more detail, see: DUNDES 1966, 14–15. Linda Dégh divided the letter into five basic elements: 1. Appeal, request; 2. The question of origin; 3. Good luck stories about those who sent the letter back; 4. Description of a case of misfortune due to failure to send the letter; 5. Instruction and promise. For more detail, see: DÉGH 2001, 189–190.

45 A few examples from youtube.com: I asked God; I requested God; Mother Teresa’s prayer; Indian wisdom; Saint Teresa’s prayer; A minute in the presence of God, Wise advice, thoughts. Accessed on: 21. 06. 2018.



Sometimes the authors of comments report that the shared music and image presentation becomes a means and aid for prayer, at times inspiring collective prayer:

- “I said the prayer together with you”
- “I prayed with you all [...] it is more effective together”
- “I prayed TO MY GOD!! THANK YOU FOR THE BEAUTIFUL VIDEO”

Many people also reported that the messages gave them spiritual consolation or advice for their life, for example:

- “It’s good even if it helps only one person!”
- “I’m sending this to those who do not yet know!”
- “As though it was about me”
- “I listen to it several times a day. If I’m in a good mood, for that reason, of if I’m in a bad mood, then for that reason.”
- “Thank you for the video, it helped me to understand things in life that I had never understood before; I thank you with all my heart.”
- Thank you for [...] the experience [...] I’m glad that I stumbled on this [...] it has filled me with love:).”

The text videos with music and images created the possibility to meet like-minded readers – although only virtually. Connections were formed, communities came into being where people could experience the practice of prayer or even offer spiritual help to others. The essential thing was not belief in the dogmas of different denominations, but rather prayer addressed to some Transcendent being, belief in its power and in the basic human values.

## Conclusion

Summing up, it can be said that chain letters with religious subjects have not disappeared from today’s new kind of folklore. Technology has not entirely removed the related superstitions from this group of texts. Indeed, the technical background provided by the internet assists the survival of chain letters and the emergence of new variants. In this way chain letters that have centuries of tradition have adapted to the technical possibilities of the internet and in many cases assumed a new form, at times losing their earlier, well-organised structure. Their language is renewed, they are thematically more colourful and more varied in form. However, the desire for a miraculous or magical change expressed in them can still be found: in the global village<sup>46</sup> that is taking shape with the development of electronic communications technologies the longing for magic or miracles is still

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<sup>46</sup> The term ‘global village’ was coined by Marshall McLuhan, one of the greatest theoreticians of the theory of communication. It refers to the notion that with the spread of electronic communications media mankind is now in a restricted space and lives its life there, similarly to the former closed world of villages and primitive tribes. For more detail, see: McLuhan 2001, 45.

part of everyday life. This demand is kept in motion by the current collective desires (preservation of health, work, family) and collective fears (death, war, existential insecurity, globalisation), “always seeking a form in the culture that enables them to appear and to be passed on.”<sup>47</sup> In this way the desires and fears transmitted in chain letters with religious content can be seen as narratives of societal and social discontent.<sup>48</sup> The reference they contain to religious experience (divine inspiration, the power of prayer and religious devotion, conversion, penance) and the positive promises associated with forwarding prove that our superstitions are among the less changing elements of our culture.<sup>49</sup> Their appearance can often be linked to borderline or crisis situations (rescuing the Earth, preventing war, dangers of the materialistic, globalised world), where rational behaviour or thinking is not satisfactory or does not give a sufficient explanation. It is here that the utopian fantasy of the human being<sup>50</sup> plays a role which in our case is manifested in belief in positive influences affecting the future connected to forwarding the letters.

The transformation undergone by the genre of chain letters with religious content and the closely related appearance of the presentation genre shows that in today’s internet variants the magical ideas regarding the future associated with forwarding the letters are gradually disappearing and negative, threatening command elements are much less frequently found. The focus is on prayers and spiritual contents reinforcing the spiritual values of the individual. The personal comments made on the texts indicate that the sharing of the new variants is motivated by belief in prayer and the supportive nature of positive pearls of wisdom and experience of this. In this case the aim of forwarding/sharing is not to influence future events but to consciously share this experience and the positive lessons arising from it.

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47 HOPPÁL 1998, 86.

48 KIBBY 2005, 771.

49 HOPPÁL 1998, 82–86.

50 Ernst Bloch regards the utopian fantasy of the human being as the key leading to the optimistic world-view, manifested in our beliefs and the symbolic actions and narratives connected to them. Its appearance can always be expected where rational behaviour/thinking is not satisfactory or does not give a sufficient explanation. On Bloch’s theory, see: Fosztró 1999, 54.

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## SAINT MARGARET OF HUNGARY: THE SAINT OF PENANCE, SERVICE TO AND LOVE OF THE HOMELAND

### 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY INTERPRETATIONS OF SAINT MARGARET

**Abstract:** The process of canonisation of Saint Margaret of Hungary lasted 700 years. It began immediately after her death (18 January 1270) but it was not until 23 July 1943 that it was successfully concluded. What was the secret of the success of the procedure in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? It was due in part to the well prepared and developed cult in Hungary that won the backing of the whole of Catholic society and actors in political life, supported by the achievements of scholarship (history, art history, literary studies, archaeology) and by works of the arts (literature, painting, sculpture). People in the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw parallels in the historical context: Margaret lived in 13<sup>th</sup> century Hungary when the country destroyed by the Mongol invasion (1241-1242) had to be rebuilt, while after the defeat in the 1<sup>st</sup> World War the country dismembered by the Treaty of Trianon had to be rebuilt. This called for a spiritual revival, and the figure and life of Margaret served as a good example for that. She became the saint of penance, service to and love of the homeland. However, her well prepared and structured cult that found links to current social problems was unable to flourish because a few months after the celebration of her canonisation the front of the Second World War reached Hungary, followed by the Soviet occupation and then, from 1948, by communism. The impetus with which the cult was being built faltered and was broken. Margaret's canonisation was successful in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century because the example of her life had meaning for the time.

**Keywords:** Saint Margaret of Hungary, role of scholarship and the arts in creating a cult, social problems in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, penance, achieving peace, sacrifice

Saint Margaret of Hungary, the seventh child of Hungarian king Béla IV and Byzantine princess Maria Laskarina was born on 27 January 1242, at the time of the Mongol invasion and became an example of self-discipline, penance and love. She brought about peace between her father and her brother Stephen, heir to the throne. In their desperate situation her parents dedicated her to God for the rescue of the country. Margaret was sent to the Dominican convent on the Isle of Rabbits and was brought up there from childhood. Several attempts were made to arrange a marriage for her, but she refused. She died at an early age in the con-

vent on 18 January 1270 and was buried there. This is why 18 January was chosen as her feast day. Her grave on the island was undisturbed until 1541. When the Turks occupied Buda, the country's capital, her relics were taken to Pozsony (now Bratislava, Slovakia).

The wish for her canonisation was first expressed after her death because of the miracles that occurred at her grave. Investigations were conducted, and the records sent to Rome in 1275.<sup>1</sup> However, Innocent V declared them incomplete. New investigations were made in 1276. The records were sent to Avignon, but no action was taken. Attempts were made to hasten the process in 1340 by Caroberto, then a century later by King Matthias – without success. It was not until 1638 that the Dominican Order revived the procedure, but by then a new case had to be launched. In this way the canonisation process was started again and again but always came to a halt.<sup>2</sup>

But despite the protracted and unsuccessful procedure, Margaret continued to be revered in the Dominican Order. In 1789 Pope Pius VI authorised her veneration and her feast in Transylvania and several other church dioceses. It was not until 23 July 1943 that the canonisation procedure was successfully concluded.<sup>3</sup>

The question inevitably arises: what was the reason for the seven centuries of failure and what social, political and church political factors contributed to its success in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

The reasons for the success of the renewed procedure in the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be clearly seen through an examination of the different stages and focal points of the process. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century it was not principally persons inside the church who cultivated the veneration of Margaret, rather it was sensitivity of the period of the Hungarian millennium (1896) towards the glorious Hungarian past and in general towards key turning points in the history of the Hungarian nation that fed into the veneration of – as she was then – Blessed Margaret. Literature at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century surrounded and even obscured the figure of Margaret with “charm, moonlight, romance”. The picture formed of the saint in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was a romantic one, full of decorative sentimentality.<sup>4</sup> This is also true of the novel by Géza Gárdonyi, *Isten rabjai* [Slaves of God] published in 1907. Nevertheless, that stylised image meant the most in that period.<sup>5</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarly research had not yet examined 13<sup>th</sup> century religiosity and so it appeared rather foreign to people of the time. But by the time János Kodolányi wrote his novel *Boldog Margit* [Blessed Margaret] in the 1930s many things were seen more clearly. Historians (Elemér Mályusz) and literary historians threw light on the so-called Gothic trend in mediaeval religiosity spread by the Franciscans

1 ÉRSZEGI 1983.

2 BÓLE 1944. 5-15.

3 BÓLE 1944. 15-59.

4 RÓNAY 1971. 317.

5 RÓNAY 1971. 316-319.



and Dominicans, and their legends were published and analysed.<sup>6</sup> What was still a curiosity for Gárdonyi at the beginning of the century was taken for granted by János Kodolányi. As a result, Kodolányi presented not an idealised picture but the world of penance in the life of the convent: Margaret, doing penance as the rebel of poverty. However, her protest against her royal descent was not a manifestation of the general spirit of the age but the conscious acceptance of the poverty of the gospels.<sup>7</sup>

Without giving further details, it can be said that there have been poems, novels, plays, statues and paintings on the life of Margaret revered as blessed. In 1942 there was also a film, based on the novel by Gárdonyi. Churches dedicated to her cult were also built.

Beginning in the 1910s archaeologists excavated the ruins of the convent on Margaret Island and in 1937 found Margaret's grave. Newspaper items about the works of literature and reports on the excavations not only kept interest in the figure of Margaret alive but also strengthened it. From the late 1920s the radio also joined in the campaign – through Dominican preachers, particularly the radio sermons of the postulator, the Dominican Kornél Bőle. As a consequence, images and statues of Margaret appeared in churches, schools, convents and monasteries. Stamps, postcards, small sacred images, information booklets and small medallions with her image to be worn as necklaces were sold. With the support of the Hungarian Catholic Women's League, Saint Margaret circles for girls were formed in Catholic girls' schools and then in wider circles. From the 1910s pilgrimages for girls were regularly held to Margaret Island in May.

Not only the Dominicans but also other orders (especially Franciscans and Benedictines) spread the cult. Veneration of Margaret strengthened markedly in the 1920s as the Hungarian Catholic church prepared for the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1930 of the death of Saint Emmerich. The Dominican order, as well as the church and society in general anticipated that Margaret would be canonised in the Saint Emmerich anniversary year. In 1930 Serédi Jusztinián, cardinal-primate and archbishop of Esztergom appointed Kornél Bőle to act as postulate in the canonisation procedure; Bőle had by then been devoting diligent attention for a decade to the cult of one of the order's great figures. Although the Saint Emmerich year ended without the successful conclusion of the canonisation procedure, the social background of the cult of Margaret grew ever wider.

1938 brought further heightened anticipation when the Hungarian Catholic church remembered Saint Stephen, the country's first and holy king, on the 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death. The message of that anniversary was reinforced by the Eucharistic World Congress held in Budapest at that time. That was the

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6 LOVAS 1916, 1939, 1942, MÁLYUSZ 1933.

7 RÓNAY 1971. 319. Because of its archaising language the novel is not an easy read. And according to Rónay, János Kodolányi was unable to reach up to the heights "where the soul conducts a dialogue with God without witnesses" [...] However, it is true that holiness, as the supernatural connection of the soul with God [...] is not a collection of novels." Rónay 1971, 319.

“Hungarian holy year”.<sup>8</sup> The Hungarian church and the postulator took advantage of the occasion of the presence in Hungary of many foreign church dignitaries, asking them to sign a declaration in support of Margaret.<sup>9</sup> But 1938 passed too without the expected announcement. But there was still hope: they were preparing for the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Margaret.

In 1942 the anniversary brought back impetus to both scholarly and literary life. A novel by Lajos Harsányi was published,<sup>10</sup> a film was made on the basis of Gárdonyi’s book,<sup>11</sup> and a whole series of works of art celebrated the anniversary.<sup>12</sup> A monthly publication was launched to spread veneration of Margaret.<sup>13</sup> In 1942 the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Blessed Margaret was celebrated by a country at war. The world had by then been wracked by war for years and the situation was regarded as “a threat similar to or even greater than the Mongol invasion”. And those times called for sacrifice for the homeland “for the future of our nation and our country”.<sup>14</sup>

Actio Catholica was established in 1932 and soon launched various campaigns that reached the whole of Catholic society: devotions, a eucharistic movement and masses were organised to support the canonisation of Margaret. Documents on the practice of virtues<sup>15</sup> and millions of petitions calling for the canonisation were presented in 57 large volumes to the Holy Father by the postulator, the Dominican Kornél Bőle.

The persistent campaign was finally crowned with success: on 23 July 1943, when there was already fighting in Rome, Pope Pius XII signed the bull of canonisation. National celebrations were held between 16-18 January 1944 and all Catholic churches were required to participate.

### **Interpretations of Margaret in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – 20<sup>th</sup> century social background of the canonisation**

Summing up the above chronological survey it can be said that repeated urgings for the canonisation of Margaret as well as historical, literary historical and archaeological research began again in the 1910s, but it was only from the 1920s that they became increasingly intensive. Behind this, at the turn of the 1910s to 1920s was the view of contemporaries who saw the situation of that time as comparable to the period of the Mongol invasion: the country lay in ruins after the

<sup>8</sup> CSÍKY 2012.

<sup>9</sup> MESZLÉNYI 1944. 228. Among others, J. Adeodatus Piazza Cardinal-Patriarch of Venice, Alexander Kokowski Cardinal-Archbishop of Warsaw, Johannes Casado Apostolic Vicariate of Thai-Binh, Augustin F. Leynaud Archbishop of Algiers, John Cicognani Apostolic Delegate Washington, Martin Gillet OP General Rome.

<sup>10</sup> HARSÁNYI, Lajos: *Égi s földi szerelem*. [Heavenly and Earthly Love] Budapest, 1941.

<sup>11</sup> In 1942, on the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Margaret. Director: Ágoston Pacséry.

<sup>12</sup> János Zakariás compiled the relevant sources. Zakariás 2007.

<sup>13</sup> SCHIPEK 1914.

<sup>14</sup> BŐLE 1944. 243.

<sup>15</sup> BŐLE 1944. 45.

world war, it had been dismembered by an unjust peace dictate, and in 1919 the Republic of Soviets, the first communist dictatorship caused enormous physical and spiritual destruction. The country was divided in spirit. Contemporaries, especially opinion-setting churchmen and intellectuals, stressed “the alarming similarity between 1241 and the 1940s”.<sup>16</sup>

In this situation there was a need for fixed points, for an example, an ideal to which people could refer, someone people – especially the young – could follow. Margaret seemed a suitable choice for this, she too lived in a country in ruins, she did penance, created peace in her family and sacrificed herself for her country and her people. She died young in consistent, self-sacrificing penance.

She could be an example in all the problems of the time: the country was in ruins – it had to be rebuilt; God punished us for our sins – penance was needed; the country was divided – social cohesion had to be achieved in the interest of the nation; individual sacrifices had to be made for the community and the nation, the homeland needed our love. According to church leaders of the time, Margaret could be an example for the young in all those ways. The “undertaking of atonement renewed the moral force of the nation” and showed that “only faithful and unwavering service to God could be really valuable service to the nation”. Seeing the high level of social activity, the bishops gave their support to the cause. The monastic orders, first of all naturally the Dominicans, but also the Franciscans and Benedictines, as well as the Catholic bishops, the entire scientific and arts worlds joined forces in the 1930s for the success of the cause.

But before we begin reorganising the country we need to change ourselves – contemporaries pointed out: to renew, do penance, and pray “to omnipotent God and beseech the saints to intercede”.<sup>17</sup> And in these efforts the “tiny”, but “heroic” Hungary needs examples to follow. They found a suitable example in the person of Margaret. The updated idea of Hungary as a protective shield for Europe grew in emphasis: “Our country was forced to take up arms against Mongols, Turks and bolshevism and defended Europe with its own body. [... In the course of its history] it gave not only heroes to the nation but also saints to the Church.”<sup>18</sup> Bishops and priests made rousing speeches in which the figure of Margaret was held up as an example of “encouragement”, “national self-esteem”, a “sublime example”, a “holy maiden”, of “self-denial” a “mystic” example of “love”, “her life was a sacrifice for the homeland”, and through her figure a “holy family”, the Arpadians appear, and more widely “the big holy family of Hungarians, and around them an entire holy country”.

The anniversary years of Hungarian saints (1930 – Saint Emmerich, 1938 – Saint Stephen) and the International Eucharistic Congress strengthened the demand for canonisation that was effectively represented in the background by well organised church and social aspirations.<sup>19</sup> The notion of national pride also played

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16 BÖLE 1944. 373, 383.

17 BÖLE 1944. 342.

18 BÖLE 1944. 353.

19 Csíky 2012.

a big part: to have one more saint for the Arpadian dynasty. And Margaret was a “martyr of Catholic Hungarian patriotism”.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the notion of nation in general was very important at that time: from the end of the 1930s some of the territories the country lost after the First World War were gradually liberated. In 1938 the southern part of historical Upper Hungary where Hungarians were the absolute majority, that had been annexed to Czechoslovakia, was returned to Hungary; Subcarpathia was returned in 1939, Northern Transylvania in 1940 and in the spring of 1941 part of the southern territories that had been annexed to Yugoslavia. All this also strengthened veneration of the Hungarian national saints giving further impetus to the procedure for the canonisation of Margaret.

Margaret, the penitent – together with others (István Kaszap, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux) – also became an intercessor for soldiers fighting in the war. She was the patron of Budapest that was suffering from bombing raids. Amidst the difficulties of the war and the approaching front it became easier to fully appreciate and understand Margaret’s sacrifice of her life.

The church prepared with care for the national celebration of the canonisation on 16, 17 and 18 January 1944. The conference of bishops set out the compulsory frame of the celebrations and requested that they remain within church frames, but that great attention should be paid to the outer trappings and symbols of the occasion. Nevertheless, in addition to the church events, a few “social” events were also organised, among others in the Academy of Music with the best musicians of the time performing works by leading composers,<sup>21</sup> in Kolozsvár (Cluj) in the National Theatre.<sup>22</sup> In Pozsony (Bratislava), at that time the capital of independent Slovakia, a solemn mass was held in Saint Martin’s cathedral with sermons in Hungarian, German and Slovakian, attended by representatives of the Hungarian embassy, the Slovak government, the Vatican chargé d’affaires and leaders of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia.

The press and radio devoted extensive coverage to the central celebrations in Budapest and the events held almost everywhere in the country. They were said “to arouse in us the trust and hope that we will not be destroyed in the present brutal dangers”.<sup>23</sup> The circular letter from the conference of bishops that was read at the celebration also emphasised “the turbulent days of the Second World War, when the lives of peaceful citizens and innocent children are just as much in danger as those of soldiers struggling on the battlefields”.<sup>24</sup> The Hungarian bishops held up Saint Margaret as an example for all strata of society: “she will now be the saint and patron of the Hungarian capital forever”<sup>25</sup> and the bishop of Veszprém, József Mindszenty added the figure of Saint Margaret to his arms<sup>26</sup>.

20 BÓLE, 1944. 248.

21 BÓLE 1944. 431.

22 BÓLE 1944. 535.

23 BÓLE 1944. 404.

24 BÓLE 1944. 415.

25 BÓLE 1944. 418, 424.

26 BÓLE 1944. 508.

In this way Margaret became and is still recognised by religious society as the saint of service to and love for the homeland. However, the well prepared and structured cult that found a connection to current social problems was unable to develop fully: a few months after the celebrations of the canonisation the front reached Hungary, followed by Soviet occupation and from 1948 by communism. The great impetus of building the cult faltered and was broken – and this kept the figure of Margaret at the level of the social expectations of the 1940s.

A number of lessons can be drawn from the 20<sup>th</sup> century canonisation procedure for Margaret of Hungary: on the one hand we see how thorough and broad the preparatory process and movement was, and obviously this would still be the case today. On the other hand, figures whose life was an example that has a message valid for the given age have a chance of being beatified/canonised.

At the same time, it could also be very instructive to examine what the figure of Saint Margaret and the example of her life mean for people today.

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## FEAST, CULT, REMEMBRANCE. REMEMBRANCE RITES IN A SZÉKELYFÖLD VILLAGE<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The study briefly presents a few rites of remembrance in a Székelyföld village where the majority of the population are ethnic Hungarians of Roman Catholic religion, and analyses one of these rites. It describes the distinctive elements of cults, their spread in time and space, and attempts to throw light on the elements of a rite that help and strengthen remembrance. During the preparations and then at the feast itself we encounter a number of objects (objects used in processions, objects of the sacred space), practices (novena, stations of the cross), decorations and costume that serve to emphasise the importance of the cult and may also help to preserve it for many years to come. The mass communications means now available greatly increase the possibilities for recording and storing the memories and then making them accessible again, thereby increasing the chances that the cult will continue indefinitely and become more widely known.

**Keywords:** cult, rite of remembrance, votive feast, pilgrimage, Székelyföld

In the religious systems of Csíkszentdomokos<sup>2</sup> there are a number of cults that can also be interpreted as rites of remembrance of a local community or of the whole village community. The environment that keeps them alive ranges from a few persons to several hundred people. Their origins differ. The practice may have arisen in response to a given historical event (the assassination of András Báthori, the “revolution” of 1989), a natural catastrophe (lightning, fire), or to a supernatural phenomenon (apparitions of Mary), or out of respect for a famous person from the village (Áron Márton). Their organisation in space and time differs. Some have been practised for centuries, others for a decade or for only a few years, while there are others that are only now taking shape. They may be linked

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1 The author is an associate of the MTA-SZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture.

2 In the Székelyföld there are a number of areas known as “holy land” where the population has preserved its denominational and ethnic homogeneity right up to the present. For a visual representation, see: CSALA 2015. Csík is the largest of these in both numbers and spatial extent. For a summary of the religious history of the region, see: MOHAY 2009. 28-37; FEJES 2014. 52-59. The settlement studied here is part of this region. According to the figures of the most recent census of 2011 the population is 97% Roman Catholic and 97% Hungarian. See: <http://www.recensamantromania.ro/rezultate-2/>. Lajos Balázs studied its customs for decades, devoting thorough attention to the description and interpretation of the rites related to the three major milestones in human life: birth, marriage and death (BALÁZS 2012, 2013; 2014a; 2015a), and to the spiritual background of these customs (BALÁZS 2006). In his monograph he also analysed the religious aspects of many elements of custom. He has devoted separate studies to the biography of Áron Márton, and the assassination of András Báthori. See BALÁZS 2014b; 2015b.



in space to a single nearby or more distant place, or to a wider region. Some are the result of a church, others of a lay initiative and operate under the corresponding guidance.

For centuries village residents have made penitential pilgrimages to commemorate the death in Csíkszentdomokos of Prince András Báthori (1563-1599)<sup>3</sup>. There are written records from as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century recording the opinion that the Pope imposed penance not only on the people of Csíkszentdomokos but on the entire population of the Felcsík region as a reprisal for the murder and they chose this form of penance.<sup>4</sup> The memorial cross<sup>5</sup> erected on the site and the Báthori song<sup>6</sup> can be mentioned as important elements of the cult.

An interesting example of rites of remembrance is the atonement held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of every month since 1992, the day commemorating the victory of the 1989 “revolution”. The devotions performed before the Eucharist set out in the parish church are in fact a celebration, if not always consciously, of the practice of free prayer.

As a consequence of natural catastrophes occurring in the village, Saint Anthony of Padua (June 13<sup>th</sup>) and Saint Elias (July 20<sup>th</sup>) are the village’s votive feast days. On one occasion a lightning strike killed most of the animals grazing on Garados hill outside the village, and on the other, part of the village was destroyed by fire following a serious drought. The first of these saints has a larger cult that will be discussed in more detail later. The feast day of Saint Elias is marked by commemoration in the sermon of the local parish priest as part of a solemn mass. Since the feast is more closely associated in the Hungarian-speaking territories with the Greek Catholic church<sup>7</sup>, the origin of this commemoration and the earlier cultivation of the cult may have been linked to the denomination that had existed earlier in the village.<sup>8</sup> The minority status and disappearance of the

3 The cardinal, who was the nephew of István Báthori, king of Poland, was the head of the principality of Transylvania for seven months. In 1599, as the cardinal fled from the battle of Sellenberk he was murdered in Csíkszentdomokos by Szeklers who felt a grievance at the violation of their ancient rights and freedoms; he was captured and beheaded in Pásztorbükk. On the historical aspects of the event and its literature, see: MAGYAR 2012. 54-65; BALÁZS 2015b. 132-134.

4 On the history of the pilgrimage, see MAGYAR 2012. 126-128.

5 There are data from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century on the existence of the memorial cross and its restoration. We know that the earlier cross was completely replaced in 1816, 1967 and 1999. See: MAGYAR 2012. 128-131; BALÁZS 2015b. 134-135.

6 According to some assumptions the text of the song was written by the cantor of the time when the cross was erected in 1816, others think it was written by the parish priest, then circulated later in print and in manuscript. See: MAGYAR 2012. 142-147. It was published on three occasions by the printing press of the Csíksomlyó Franciscans, in 1817, 1838 and 1867. PAP 2009. 82; 96; 108. The 1867 version can also be seen online on the website of the Csíkszentdomokos library. See: <http://www.csikszentdomokosikonyvtar.eoldal.hu/fenykepek/bathory-andras-emlekere/1.html>.

It can still be found today in hand-written prayer and song books in Csíkszentdomokos.

The melody is borrowed from the hymn that begins *Ó emberi gyarló nemzetség* and can be traced back to a 17<sup>th</sup> century German funeral song. See: DOBSZAY 2007. 504.

7 See: BÁLINT 1977. II. 62.

8 As in a number of settlements in the Csík basin, the Romanian, Greek Catholic population that settled in Csíkszentdomokos in the 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries practically ceased to exist in the 1940s as a result of the voluntary and forced conversions. See: ILYÉS 1998. 96; VARGA 2011. 51.



Greek Catholics (emigration, assimilation into the majority church) may explain why this cult is less important here.

Under the influence of the apparition of Mary to a woman in Csíkszentdomokos in the 1990s,<sup>9</sup> a community of varying composition was organised and for a short while regularly visited the site of the apparition and recalled its details.

A rite of remembrance is linked to the person of Bishop Áron Márton (1896-1980)<sup>10</sup> who was born in Csíkszentdomokos, which is almost impossible to take into account because following the official initiation of canonisation procedure in 1992 not only in Transylvania but also in the entire territory of historical Hungary countless works have been produced, institutions, events and communities created with the aim of cultivating his memory, making his person as fully known as possible and popularising it.<sup>11</sup> Such initiatives include the establishment of a museum in his native village in 2010 on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death<sup>12</sup>, commemorative conferences that have been held each year since 2012 on the anniversary of his birth<sup>13</sup>, and since 2013 pilgrimages evoking his life career<sup>14</sup>. People from his native village also often make pilgrimages to the feast of the Gyulafehérvár cathedral, where they also remember the anniversary of his death on September 29<sup>th</sup>, the feast day of Saint Michael. 2016 was an outstanding year in this latter series of events as, to make it more accessible, his tomb was moved from the crypt to the south side-aisle. In that year a prayer booklet<sup>15</sup> was also published containing the Stations of the Cross expressed in Áron Márton's own words, a litany seeking his intercession, a prayer novena<sup>16</sup> and other prayers. Frequent elements

9 Neither the woman who saw the apparition nor those who participated in the practice remembered the exact year.

10 The bishop born in Csíkszentdomokos was head of the Gyulafehérvár Diocese from 1939-1980. He was revered as a saint in his own lifetime for his exemplary performance as a bishop, his steadfastness in the turbulent times, and the sacrifices he made for his fellow men. His diocese initiated his canonisation immediately after the political changes of 1989.

11 The website of the Gyulafehérvár Archdiocese gives detailed information on the bishop's biography as a "servant of God", his writings, the canonisation procedure, works of art preserving his memory, institutions bearing his name, sources, events, commemorations and conferences touching on and discussing his person. <http://ersekseg.ro/hu/martonaron>

12 The museum has its own website: <http://www.martonaronmuzeum.ro/>

13 The aim of the event is to assist and popularise research on Áron Márton. The Catholic weekly *Vasárnap* (previous website: <https://vasarnap.verbumkiado.ro/>), from January 2017: <https://romkat.ro/>) and the website cited in footnote no. 11 give detailed information on these events.

14 The three-day pilgrimage presenting the main stations in the life of the prelate was not initiated or organised from his native village, but the village is its first destination. Other stages are the place where he was imprisoned for years (Máramarossziget) the place where he was ordained as bishop (Kolozsvár), and his episcopal see (Gyulafehérvár). The most recent, fourteenth pilgrimage was held in September 2017. Information on these events can also be found on a dedicated facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Marton-Aron-Zarandoklatok-660524897424282/>

15 Kovács 2016.

16 Before the feast György Jakubinyi, the present archbishop of the Gyulafehérvár Archdiocese in his circular letter no. 1294/2016 invited priests and the faithful to the prayer novena for the beatification of Áron Márton, first held on 20-28 September 2016. <https://ersekseg.ro/hu/content/szekesegyhazi-bucsu-es-marton-aron-imakilenced>

in the rites of remembrance are a prayer for his beatification<sup>17</sup>, one of the Áron Márton hymns<sup>18</sup> and more recently prayers published in the prayer booklet mentioned above.

In the following I shall deal briefly with a single cult and the rites of remembrance related to it. In addition to the origin of the veneration and a description of the related rites of remembrance, I shall attempt to throw light on their characteristics.

### Cult of Saint Anthony of Padua

The origin and survival of the cult in Csíkszentdomokos is almost certainly linked to the veneration of Saint Anthony of Padua by the Franciscans in Csíksomlyó not far from the village that can be dated back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and has continued right up to the present. It has been suggested<sup>19</sup> that the beginning of the veneration of the Franciscan saint in the Csík area and the Székelyföld region can be related to construction of the votive chapel<sup>20</sup> that still stands on the south side of Kis-Somlyó hill. According to present knowledge, the earliest Tuesday novena devotions were associated with this place.<sup>21</sup> The cult of the saint grew further when a confraternity was organised in 1772 to cultivate it.<sup>22</sup> This is not the only chapel erected in the Csík basin in honour of Saint Anthony of Padua. He is also the patron saint of the churches at Csíkcsicsó<sup>23</sup> and Újtusnád<sup>24</sup>. In Csíkmadaras the ironworkers built a chapel in his honour.<sup>25</sup>

17 It is now a widespread custom in the archdiocese to say the prayer at the end of mass. In Csíkszentdomokos it is also often heard at the end of paraliturgical prayer occasions.

18 The website of the Gyulafehérvár Archdiocese mentions two hymns. The "Áron Márton Hymn, for his beatification and canonisation" was written by Ágoston Csenkey and is sung to the melody of the Hungarian Saints hymn (SZVU 298/145); the text of the "Hymn to Bishop Áron" was written by István Ferenczes, the music was composed by Franciscan Father József Márk. See: <https://ersekseg.ro/?q=node/3327#2>. A third version is also known in Csíkszentdomokos; the text and melody by Ferenc Heinrich. Up to 2017 the first version (the hymn with a text by Ágoston Csenkey) was in use in the village, followed by the Hungarian Saints hymn with new strophes added, "Lord we kneel before you for our homeland" in which Áron Márton is also mentioned among the 20<sup>th</sup> century confessors. See: <http://www.magyarokurir.hu/hirek/uj-versszakokkal-bovult-az-isten-hazankert-terdelunk-elod-be-kezdetu-enek>. I take this opportunity to express my thanks to Attila Fórika, Csíkszentdomokos cantor for information on the hymns.

19 BOROS 1994. 134.

20 On the history of the chapel and its furnishings that survived the Mongol incursion in 1661 that also affected Csíksomlyó, see: KOVÁCS 1897. 11-23, MIHÁLY 1996.

21 See: BÁLINT 1977. I. 435.

22 A monograph has been written on the history of the Csíksomlyó Saint Anthony of Padua Confraternity in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries; it includes a detailed description of the Tuesday novena devotions. See: KOVÁCS 1897.

23 According to an entry made in 1721 in the *Historia Domus* of Csíkdélne (Csicsó was a filial of Delne until it became independent in 1783) the chapel that stood on the site of the church that did not yet exist at that time was also dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua. SZABÓ 2013. 94. Research on the history of settlements in the Middle Ages also seems to confirm this. BOTÁR 2013.107.

24 A church was dedicated to his veneration here in the 1860s. <https://ersekseg.ro/hu/templom/1105>

25 It seems likely that the earliest date for the presence of the cult here is the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The chapel does not appear in the first military survey; from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until it was rebuilt in 1990, only a stone cross marked its earlier presence. See: PÁL-ANTAL 1996.319; BOTÁR 2013. 142.

As mentioned earlier, in Csíkszentdomokos the feast day of Saint Anthony of Padua (June 13<sup>th</sup>) is the votive feast day of the village. Both the literature<sup>26</sup>, and the present memory of local people mention loss of livestock or a fire as the reason for the dedication. It may seem reasonable that following the loss of their livestock they turn for intercession to Saint Anthony of Padua as the patron saint of animals<sup>27</sup>, and after the fire to Saint Elias as the patron saint of weather. The question also arises of why the village promised the vow for the given day? In the absence of sources, we cannot tell whether it was because the catastrophe occurred on that day or because the feast of the patron saint is on that day.<sup>28</sup> It is not known precisely when the two feasts originated; the local people mention them as a tradition with a very long past. According to some opinions<sup>29</sup> the statues of Saint Anthony of Padua and Saint Elias on the main altar may date from the time the church was built (1795-1802), which allows us to conclude that both votive feast days already existed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The former cult had a stronger following and more written records survive attesting to this. To date the earliest known source that could confirm the existence of the feast of Saint Anthony of Padua as a votive feast dates from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1891 the parish priest at the time mentioned in connection with renovation of the earlier Stations of the Cross on Garados hill that it was the custom each year on the feast day of Saint Anthony of Padua to hold a procession of the Stations of the Cross.<sup>30</sup> According to oral tradition,<sup>31</sup> the construction of the Stations of the Cross on Garados hill was associated not with the votive feast but with a much earlier period when the village did not yet have a church and the villagers had to regularly visit the church outside the neighbouring village, the ruins of which can still be seen. But as it is still used today and according to recollections was used in the recent past only in connection with the feast day of Saint Anthony of Padua, it could be assumed that it was built after the vow was made. We have descriptions of the structures of the Stations from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. At first individual families undertook to

26 Székely, László (SZÉKELY 1943. 24; n.d. [1995] 202.) and a manuscript by an unknown author (N. n.d. 31.); their data are cited in (BÁRTH 1990. 394; BÁLINT-BARNA 1994. 137). The feast day of Saint Anthony of Padua is mentioned in connection with an old fire; Lajos Bálint (BÁLINT n. d. 52), the village's former parish priest and the literature citing him (Balázs 1999. 225.) mention the feast as marking the memory of loss of a large number of cattle.

27 Sándor Bálint mentions the construction of a number of Saint Anthony chapels as a result of vows made during livestock epidemics. He also described a number of Saint Anthony's day customs that served the protection and fertility of livestock. See: BÁLINT 1977. I. 436-437. The custom in Csíkszentdomokos also mentioned by László Székely (placing eggs on the altar in the hope that the hens will lay eggs abundantly) still survives today in the memory of a few, and according to accounts is it still very occasionally practised by a few individuals. See: SZÉKELY n. d. [1995] 204.

28 The latter was raised as a possibility by Gyula Perger following a conference paper in October 2016. I take this opportunity to thank him for the idea of this possibility regarding the vow.

29 This view was held by Lajos Bálint, first archbishop of the Gyulafehérvár Archdiocese in his work on the history of the village parish that he compiled at the end of his ten years of service (1968-1979) in Csíkszentdomokos. BÁLINT n. d. It also appears as an idea taken from him in his monograph on the village published in 1999.

30 *Historia Domus* 1891.

31 See: SZÉKELY 1943. 24; BÁLINT-BARNA 1994. 137; BÁLINT n. d. 5.

replace and care for the destroyed crosses, on the basis of an unwritten law that survived in oral tradition.<sup>32</sup> This tradition was no longer followed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; in 1972 the parish erected new stone crosses in place of the destroyed wooden crosses, financed from donations by the rosary confraternities.<sup>33</sup> The former unwritten law now hardly survives even in memory. Since 2010 a family has voluntarily undertaken the upkeep of the entire Stations of the Cross.

The commemoration of Saint Anthony's day has a traditional order. Some people prepare for the feast with the Saint Anthony novena, either individually or in collective prayers. The devotions are probably a still used variant of a practice initiated in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the Franciscans in Csíksomlyó.<sup>34</sup>

In the early morning of the feast day the faithful gather in the church and after receiving the priest's blessing, they organise themselves into the traditional procession order and accompanied by the sound of the church bells they set out for the site of the catastrophe.<sup>35</sup> Those who are unable to walk the distance stay in the church where they perform the same devotions as the participants in the procession. Generally,<sup>36</sup> the symbol referring to the feast, the main banner with one of the portrayals of Saint Anthony common in the Hungarian-speaking region<sup>37</sup> (the infant Jesus on his arm, a lily in his hand) is carried at the front of the procession. Next follow the small bell ringers<sup>38</sup>, then the banner carriers<sup>39</sup>, the men, the priest and his attendants, and finally the women. On the way they greet each cross they pass by waving the banners three times, then when they reach Garados hill they begin the Stations of the Cross, led by the parish priest. Before the ceremony at the individual stations begins, they place a wreath of flowers on the stone cross of the station.<sup>40</sup> Almost everyone attaches great importance to picking flowers on the hill.<sup>41</sup> Most of them favour a purple plant known as Saint Anthony's flower which they said they do not generally preserve and use as a sacred experience. But there are some who keep it pressed in their prayer books for a long time, although they were unable or unwilling to explain the significance of this. The devotions of the Stations of the Cross end at the top of the hill with the litany, prayer and hymn of Saint Anthony. Since 2009 this final ceremony has been conducted around an out-

32 See: *Historia Domus* 1891; SZÉKELY n. d. [1995] 202-203.

33 BÁLINT n. d. 26.

34 See: BÁLINT 1977. I. 435; SZÉKELY n. d. [1995] 203-204.

35 My description of the celebration is based on observant participation in three different years (1996, 2017, 2018) and on interviews conducted in 1994-1998 and 2013-2018.

36 On one occasion it was not carried at the front, but immediately before the priest and his attendants.

37 See: MIKLÓSI SIKES 1995. 75.

38 In the last two years this role was taken by children, earlier it had been performed by older men.

39 On the occasion of observations in the last two years the men carried two banners representing the Heart of Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus; earlier (in 1996) only the women carried two red and two white banners.

40 Earlier the wreaths were made of wildflowers picked on the spot during the Stations of the Cross. At present making the wreath is the task of the nearest rosary confraternity.

41 Not only the women and children, but also the men feel it to be important. Everyone, without exception, returns home with a bunch of flowers.

door statue of Saint Anthony that within a short space of time became an important element of the sacred space. This can be seen in the touching that follows the church ceremony. Regardless of gender or age, many people feel it important to touch the statue with flowers gathered on the spot. Then everyone places their donation in front of the statue; the sum collected is used to have a mass said for all those who took part in the feast. Those who remain in the church for prayers make donations in the same way, to be used for the same purpose. The votive object erected beside the 14<sup>th</sup> station was donated by a man from Csíkszentdomokos who had recovered from an illness. The piece that he carved himself portrays Saint Anthony in the iconographic type mentioned earlier, holding the infant Jesus. The man who regarded his recovery as a miracle, together with his contemporaries<sup>42</sup> undertook to maintain it and on special occasions it is decorated with their help, under his direction.<sup>43</sup> On reaching the bottom of the hill<sup>44</sup> they again fall into traditional processional order and return to the church. On the way they give Saint Anthony flowers as gifts to the villagers who have gathered to welcome them back and for mass. When they arrive at the church a few individuals consider it important to decorate the statue of Saint Anthony at the entrance and the Sacred Heart altar beside it with flowers gathered on the procession. The feast ends with participation in the mass.

As a consequence of the political change in 1948 the spatial extent of the remembrance was restricted to the grounds of the parish church. The Stations of the Cross devotions under the direction of the church were performed in the churchyard at stations built into the stone fence around the church. According to accounts by local people, parallel with this smaller groups gathered at different points in the village to perform the customary open-air rite of remembrance. Because they could not visit the site of the past catastrophe en masse on the village's votive feast day, the groups composed mainly of neighbours and relatives went to the cross nearest to where they lived and performed the customary devotions there (Stations of the Cross, Saint Anthony litany, hymn and prayer).<sup>45</sup> At some places in the village further away from the place of pilgrimage, older people still follow this tradition because infirmity prevents them from making the pilgrimage to Garados hill.

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42 Since 1975 meetings of peer groups has been a big tradition in the village. For more detail on the celebration, see: BALÁZS 1992; 1999. 195-196. Sometimes contemporaries will mark an anniversary by placing a public monument or undertaking to restore one. In 2009 those born in 1944, the 65-year-olds in the village undertook the costs of restoring the "chapel": the base on which the statue stands and the wooden structure above it.

43 For the past nine years, on the day before the feast of Saint Anthony the "peer group women" gather in the yard of the man's house and weave decorative elements out of flowers donated by florists and contemporaries; the man transports them together with birch branches on his tractor to the site.

44 Because the hill is very steep, coming down is not easy, especially for the elderly.

45 Other church feasts (e.g. Corpus Christi, Whitsun) were observed in this way too.

The saint's cult is still alive also in individual religious practice. Evidence of this can be seen in the images of Saint Anthony of Padua placed on the walls of private homes, in privately-owned prayer books<sup>46</sup>, and popular literature<sup>47</sup>.

Kapitány and Kapitány analysed the system of symbols of our feasts using Jan Assmann's technique of remembrance.<sup>48</sup> Following their train of thought, I have attempted to place the rites of remembrance presented above in their system of criteria, according to the eight components of remembrance technique they identified.

1. *Awareness, taking to heart, engraving in the heart.* In earlier times, in the case of Csíkszentdomokos too, entering into the spirit of a feast involved a wider range of more complex preparations. But in all cases the rites of remembrance described here are still preceded by shorter or longer preparation (performing devotions – prayer, novena, making certain decorative elements, repairing the stations, etc.) in a small group (of family, relatives, neighbours) or a larger one (an entire religious community).

2. *Education, transmission.* In the case of Csíkszentdomokos it can be stated with confidence that it is mainly the older age group who make the most effort to pass on the traditional celebration. A few teachers and young couples are also committed to participation in the feast and to passing it on through education. They consider it important to teach their students and children about the different rites of remembrance. As a participant there is a much greater possibility of learning the characteristics of the rites and of developing a readiness to transmit them.

3. *Visible representation.* A number of “visual aids” referring to the feast can be found in the rites of remembrance described here. They include the banners used on the occasion, their floral decorations, and the decoration of different objects in the sacred space (station, statue, cross), and its buildings (church) with birch branches and flowers. Some of the participants wear folk costume to emphasise the significance of the feast.

4. *Limitative, border-marking symbolism.* The birch branches mentioned in the previous component are used to mark the more important sites of the sacred space and set them apart from everyday life.

5. *Storing, publishing.* The local TV station that has a cameraman present throughout religious events in the village plays an important role in recording and storing the collective memories and making them accessible again. They are broadcast later on the TV channels, enabling those who could not be present at the event to participate indirectly. This makes possible a wider and more complex collective remembrance. The use of facebook is a widespread phenomenon in the village too; photographs posted and shared there help to make past events more widely known and memorable.

46 N. N. 1911, HARMATH 1995.

47 VARGA n. d.

48 KAPITÁNY – KAPITÁNY 2012.



6. *Feasts of collective remembrance.* The rites of remembrance presented here are in all cases feasts of collective remembrance; it is always a community that remembers a past event or outstanding person.

7. *Oral transmission.* Some collective rites in Csíkszentdomokos are linked to individual or collective creations with historical traditions, that have survived up to the present, spread orally, in manuscript or print. There are others that are only now taking shape.

8. *Canonisation of the text of the "contract".* In the case of the village studied, most – although not all – of the rites of remembrance are canonised, that is, they are rites recognised by the church and held under its direction.

### Summing up

I have tried to present rites from the collective religious practice in Csíkszentdomokos that can also be interpreted as a feast in remembrance of a particular person or event. The feasts of Saint Anthony of Padua and Saint Elias are votive feasts of the village. In this case the vow is intended to achieve avoidance of a repetition of the catastrophe. The Báthori pilgrimage can also be regarded as a votive feast but in this case the vow is not based on a belief but was made under the influence of church penance. Here the main emphasis is on penance and winning the remission of sin. Besides traditions reaching back hundreds of years, we also find others that are just now taking shape. The places of remembrance are linked to interior and exterior spaces in Csíkszentdomokos. The attraction they exert may be limited to the village, or to the villages of the Felcsík region, or it may extend to the whole of historical Hungary. General and specific cult elements can be found. Because the ceremony is of a Roman Catholic nature, the structure of the rite follows the order of Catholic church ceremonies, consequently prayer (stations of the cross, litany, prayer for the given feast) and the hymns (Saint Anthony's hymn, Báthori hymn, Áron Márton's hymn), as well as the mass are especially important liturgical elements. In the course of the rite of remembrance the participant encounters sacred and profane objects that can serve to keep remembrance alive. A new element in the sacred space, the open-air statue of Saint Anthony was placed at a point on top of the hill where it can be seen from a number of places in the village. The statue, or the bunch of flowers taken home from the pilgrimage can also serve to keep veneration of the saint alive. The rite of remembrance includes devotions that facilitate remembrance on several levels. At the same time the stations of the cross performed during the feast are also a reminder of Christ's passion. The remembrance makes it possible to evoke both veneration of the saint and to recall the past event. Some parts of the feast are organised by the participants themselves. The individual or collective tasks (preparing decorative elements, and putting them in place, caring for the stations of the cross, performing various devotions, undertaking functions in the procession,

etc.) are undertaken voluntarily. Everyone looks for a way they can help to make the feast as memorable as possible both for the individual and the community.

In conclusion it can be said that the presence of an outsider doing research in the village can also influence the villagers' wish to remember through recognition and strengthening of the value of rites of remembrance and the importance of transmitting them.

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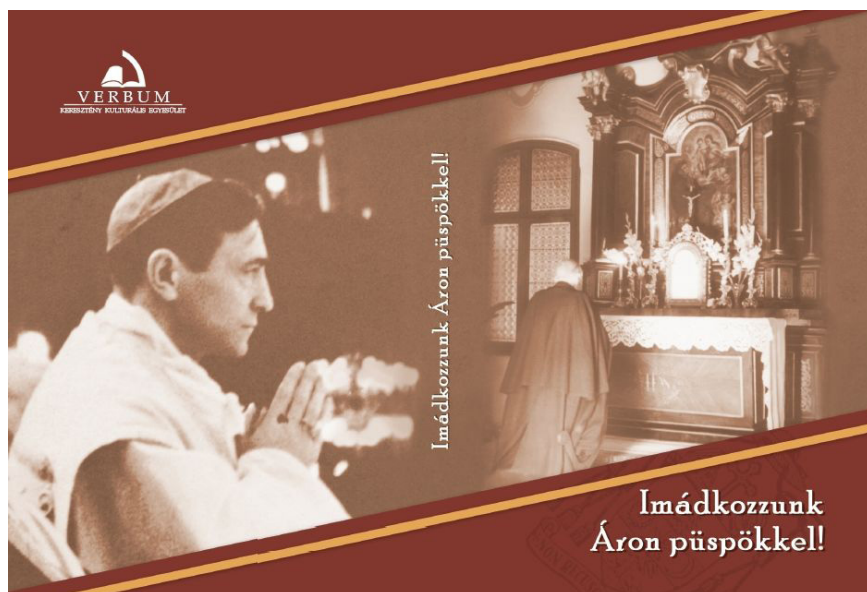


Pilgrims listening the Báthori-song. (1994)





Atonement by the Monstrance with Eucharist in the Church of Csíkszentdomokos.  
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Cover of the Áron Márton prayer-booklet. (published in 2016)



The last occasion of the novenae of Saint Anthony of Padua in a private home. (2018)



Pilgrims on the feast day of Saint Anthony of Padua, lead by ringin churchbell. (2018)





Greeting of a wayside cross. (2018)



Walking the stations of the cross on the Gardos mountain with flower-decorated stone cross in the front. (2018)



Flower-culler women. (2018)



Flower-culler men. (2018)





Pilgrims pray the litany of Saint Anthony of Padua. (2018)



Touching the statue after the litany. (2018)



Open-air statue of Saint Anthony of Padua. (2018)





High mess in the Church. (2018)



Paraliturgical devotion on the feast day of Saint Anthony of Padua. (2017)

## CHANGE OF DENOMINATION AS A GESTURE OF INTEGRATION

### EXAMPLES FROM CSONGRÁD (19<sup>TH</sup> TO 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)

The continuous growth of historical literature on the situation and everyday difficulties of religious minorities shows that the study of local communities can always add further details and enrich knowledge on the coexistence of denominations and conflicts between them.<sup>2</sup> In this study I analyse a previously unexamined slice in the social history of Csongrád, the path and possibilities of the local Calvinist minority for social integration from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the construction of the Csongrád Calvinist church (1937).

\*

The fact, that in the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the inhabitants of Szentes became Calvinists basically determined the relation with the neighbour settlement, the Roman Catholic Csongrád. The frame of the first documented conflict was an event that the people of Szentes simply called a “flight”.

In the summer of 1685 Tatars cooperating with the Turks set up camp in Szentes and, in their desperation, the people of Szentes fled to the Csongrád fortress. The people of Csongrád took in the refugees but the authorities forbade them to hold religious services or give religious instruction to the Calvinist children. The people of Szentes therefore kept a close watch on the movement of the Tatar troops in their town, and when they withdrew, they immediately left their restrictive refuge.<sup>3</sup>

Following the *Carolina resolutio* issued by King Charles III the differences between the two settlements were further aggravated.<sup>4</sup> The Csongrád parish priest kept a vigilant eye on the respect of Catholic feasts and rest days in the entire region. In 1725, for example, after the people of Szentes worked all day on the feast of Saint Emmerich, the Csongrád parish priest rebuked them and the priest barely escaped a lynching.<sup>5</sup>

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2 As an example, see studies by Muntagné Tabajdi, Zsuzsanna.

3 SIMA 1914. 145–146.

4 *Carolina resolutio*: a decree of King Charles III ordering the situation of Hungarian Protestants (1731). Among the most important measures it extended the rights of big landowners also to the exercise of religion, imposed harsh punishment on anyone converting from Roman Catholicism to a Protestant faith, and made it compulsory for all denominations to respect the Catholic feast days. MAGYAR KATOLIKUS LEXIKON II. 175–176.

5 SIMA 1914. 223.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries Csongrád was denominationally homogeneous, all of its inhabitants were Roman Catholics.<sup>6</sup> The first known data indicating a Calvinist moving into the town dates from 1827. We can read in the protocol of an episcopal see interrogation the name of a 30-year-old Calvinist hajdú<sup>7</sup> István Ibolya performing service in Csongrád but born in Szentes. According to his confession, István Ibolya witnessed the scene where the parish priest of Csongrád rubbed lard on his sick housekeeper. The parish priest declared with indignation that the hajdú only wanted to take petty revenge on him because the priest had forbidden him to see his beloved, a servant of the clergy house. The priest was afraid that “bastardry would cause a scandal in the priest’s house”.<sup>8</sup> A document written in defence of the parish priest cites another ignominious case to discredit the words of the witness:

“The above-named Calvinist Istvány Ibolya, as a kind of hajdú, shot a dog that belonged to the master’s workers. He ordered János Dányi, a resident of Csongrád to cut up the dog and cook it with cabbage for the Catholic workers who ate the dog meat and they all fell sick”.<sup>9</sup>

The story was known throughout the town and it appears from the terms used in the account that they regarded it not as an isolated, individual prank or a case of a hajdú outwitting the peasants, but as an *interdenominational conflict*: the story of a Calvinist who makes Catholics eat dog meat. In the statement he made, Antal Eszes 70-year-old council member, in addition to the weak morals and character of the hajdú, summed up his greatest sin in the following words: “He’s a Calvinist – it’s not worth keeping him in Csongrád.”<sup>10</sup> The hajdú was also questioned at the hearing; he claimed that he was prospering in Csongrád and went to hear mass in the Catholic church almost every day.<sup>11</sup>

István Ibolya was tied to Csongrád by his service, his name does not appear later among the inhabitants of the settlement. The census held not long after in the settlement, in 1828, does not record the presence of a single Calvinist or Lutheran family.<sup>12</sup>

6 The records of contemporary Canonical Visitations clearly state that persons of other religions had not previously lived in Csongrád.

7 *Hajdú*: Employee of the county or a landlord with security or magisterial function in the 17–19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

8 Vác Episcopal and Capitular Archive, Acta Privatorum (hereinafter: VPL APriv.) – János Mátyus 22 June 1824. Document signed by several witnesses.

9 VPL APriv. – János Mátyus, 22 June 1824. Document signed by several witnesses.

10 VPL APriv. – János Mátyus, 10 July 1823. Record of interrogation, evidence given by János Eszes.

11 “Although I am a Calvinist, I appear here in the Catholic church almost every day”. 10 July 1823. Record of interrogation, evidence given by István Ibolya. The practice was far from unusual around that time also among Lutherans living in the Tés filial of Csongrád where – in the absence of a preacher – they took part in Roman Catholic devotions and spiritual instruction. Vác Episcopal and Capitular Archive, Acta Parochiarum (hereinafter: VPL APar. Cs.) 2 July 1815. Letter from Tés tobacco farmers to the diocesan bishop.

12 BARTA 1980. 198.

From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the number of Protestant inhabitants in the town gradually increased. The daughter of Lajos Lendvai, an estate manager of Calvinist faith and his Catholic wife, Jozefa Draskovits was christened in 1849 – that is, in keeping with the practice of the time, the father had given a letter of mutual concession.<sup>13</sup> In the 1850s we find among the inhabitants of Csongrád József Csajági, a Calvinist noble and József Hering, a Lutheran bookbinder.<sup>14</sup> In the years following the Compromise of 1867 the Csongrád parish priest recorded, in addition to the 16,772 Roman Catholics living in the inner town, 517 Jews, 56 Augustans, 9 Helvetians and 2 Greek Catholics.<sup>15</sup>

The first Calvinist midwife appears in the records in the mid-1860s. Mrs Gáspár Magdits, qualified midwife was paid 50 forints a year by the town. She carried out her work without hindrance right up until 1888, when parish priest Antal Hegyi forbade her, as a person of a different denomination, to enter the sacristy of the Catholic church which meant that she could not attend the christening of infants she had helped bring into the world. However, Mrs Magdits was well aware that Catholic mothers regarded the christening as a task of outstanding importance and if it was not held they would not use her services. The midwife brought a civil case in which she attempted to prove that banning her from the sacristy was equivalent to depriving her of her position.<sup>16</sup>

In general, the Protestants living in Csongrád belonged to the more prosperous stratum of civil servants or engaged in valued trades. In 1895 the chief administrative officer of Csongrád and the district administrative officer were both Calvinists, as was the municipal assistant physician, János Borsos. Borsos's son, Imre recalled the state of affairs in the 1890s as follows:

“The town was 99 per cent Catholic. My father, Antal Szomodi a cutler, and József Bagossy a merchant constituted the Calvinist Church in Csongrád. The three of them requested the drawing teacher Ferenc Vannay to give instruction in the Calvinist religion, and for this my parents paid him 5 forints a month. He had only two pupils: Pista Szomodi and myself.”<sup>17</sup>

Ferenc Vannay was also a talented painter, so the parish priest Antal Hegyi commissioned him to paint the Assumption of Mary (1894) and the Saint Anne (1896) altar paintings in the Church of Our Lady.<sup>18</sup>

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13 Archive of the Parish of Our Lady, Csongrád (hereinafter: NPI) Registers of births, 14 February 1849.

14 NPI Registers of births.

15 NPI *Historia Domus*, Csongrád Vol. I, 113.

16 For detail on the activity of Mrs Magdits, see: Gyöngyössi 2014. 188–192.

17 Jánosi 1983. 70. The local decision on religious instruction for Calvinist children was approved by the school board in 1896. See: Hungarian National Archive, Csongrád County Archive, Csongrád Archive, Municipality of Csongrád, 1865–1872 and 1880–1923 Municipality School Board, from 1897 documents of the State Elementary and Higher Elementary School Boards 1869–1919 (1925) (hereinafter: MNL CsML CsL School Board protocols), 23. 10. 1896. No. 7.

18 VPL APar. Cs. 27 August 1898. Record of episcopal see interrogation, evidence given by Ferenc Vannay.

The work connection between Antal Hegyi and Vannay is of particular note because the Csongrád parish priest regularly voiced his deep antipathy towards members of other denominations. Writing in the columns of *Csongrádi Közlöny* [Csongrád Gazette] he called it outrageous that Jews and Calvinists held the most important leading positions in the Roman Catholic town.<sup>19</sup> He described measures taken by district administrative officer Ferenc Réti as a series of offences against religion that he – as Catholic spiritual leader – had to strongly oppose. An instructive example in the series of articles is the ban on gathering twigs and on festive canon shots on Corpus Christi day.<sup>20</sup> When Ferenc Borbás, an employee of the district administration converted before his marriage to his fiancée's Calvinist denomination, parish priest Hegyi tried to shame him through the press and to link his "disloyalty" to the Catholic religion to his professional diligence.<sup>21</sup> He refused to enter László Lászlóffy Jr, a landowner among those to be married because his fiancée was a Lutheran woman.<sup>22</sup> That the views taken of Calvinist intellectuals in Csongrád in this period were very contradictory was seen in the strong protests on the grounds of her religion made by parents when Zsella Pepich, a Calvinist teacher took up her position.<sup>23</sup>

At first Protestants in Csongrád could attend religious services only in Szentes. However, by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Zoltán Futó and Lajos Gerőc, ministers in Szentes, and on major feast days Lajos Pap, district preacher? (körlelkész) preached in the Central Elementary School or in the Girls' Higher Elementary School.<sup>24</sup> The Csongrád Calvinist filial church was officially established on 31 October 1904 in the art room of the Girls' Higher Elementary School.<sup>25</sup>

Although around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century the number of both Jews and Calvinists in Csongrád increased, their numbers were nearly insignificant compared to the Roman Catholic majority (approx. 21,000 to 500). As a consequence, the main possibility for improving social integration was to change religion or denomination.

The rules for converting and change of religion in the period examined were set out in the relevant sections of Law No. 53 of 1868. According to the main provisions of the law, such a procedure could only be initiated by persons over the age of 18. The person concerned had to appear with two freely chosen witnesses

19 *Csongrádi Közlöny*, 22 December 1895. Vol. II, No. 51, p. 3.

20 *Csongrádi Közlöny*, 23 June 1895. Vol. II, No. 25, p. 3.

21 "His soul will give account before God and the Catholics do not lose nor the Protestants gain with people of this calibre who leave their faith for a woman, but we cannot suppress our sense of disapproval that Catholic employees of a Catholic community undertake such services. What can people who think this way about religion feel in the matter of their sense of duty?" *Tiszavidék*, 21 May 1893. Vol. IV, No. 21, p. 3.

22 VPL APriv. Antal Hegyi, 14 March 1892. Letter from residents of Csongrád to the Vác Episcopal See.

23 *Csongrádi Újság*, 22 October 1905. Vol. III, No. 43, p. 2.

24 MNL CsML CsL School Board protocols, 22. 03. 1896. No. 124. At the request of the Ministry of the Szentes Calvinist Church, the classroom of the boys' first grade in the central school is to be made available on Sundays for religious services to be held for Calvinist residents of Csongrád.

25 *Csongrádi Újság*, 30 October 1904. Vol. II No. 44, p. 2.



before the local leader of the congregation they wished to leave, where they were to declare their intention to leave. This was to be repeated two weeks later. The spiritual leader was to issue a certification on both occasions – if, for any reason, he refused to do so, certification by the witnesses was also sufficient. If the certifications were presented to the minister of the chosen church, there was no further legal obstacle to the necessary ceremonies. Notification of the successful conversion was sent to the leaders of the church that had been left.<sup>26</sup>

According to data in the archive of the Church of Our Lady in Csongrád, the first person to convert was Mária Bimbó, an unmarried woman, in 1860.<sup>27</sup> In the next ten years six men followed her example – three of them unmarried young men. From 1870 up to the end of the century a total of eight Calvinists decided to become members of the Roman Catholic Church. The number tripled in the next three decades (35 conversions), and between 1930 and 1937 there were a further 13 conversions. Written documents have survived in the Csongrád parish for a total of 64 persons between 1860 and 1937. Men and women appear in almost equal numbers (30–34). Of the 34 women, 21 were children or unmarried, three were widows. Among the men it is possible to establish that seven were unmarried young men.

The place of birth of the converts shows great diversity: 17 different place names can be found in the personal documents, mainly in Békés and Bács-Kiskun Counties. The following variants are given for the name of the first religion (that was to be left): *Helvetian* (10), *Evangelical Reformed* (14), *Reformed* (6), *Augustan Evangelical* (5), *Augustan* (3), *Evangelical Lutheran* (1), *Lutheran* (1), *Calvinist* (1). This gives the impression that in reality they were unable to distinguish between the different Protestant churches and trends.

There is very little information on the social status of the converts. Two persons are called gentlewoman or gentlelady, but we also find on the list, for example, the widow of the chief notary of Somogy County, and the wife of the director of the Csongrád higher elementary school.<sup>28</sup> The list of names examined includes a surprisingly high number of orphans and children born outside marriage.

Widow Mrs. János Ballai née Mária Soós is the only person of whom it can be said that she converted to the Roman Catholic religion on her deathbed. Because of the state of health of the applicant, parish priest Antal Hegyi exempted her from the need to apply twice.<sup>29</sup> In a number of cases we can see that a few years after the decision made, typically by the head of the family, other close family members were christened within a few years. This happened in the case of the three Budai children, whose father was born in Szarvas and left his *Evangelical*

26 Law No. LIII of 1868 on reciprocity among the officially recognised religious denominations. For details, see: <http://net.jogtar.hu>

27 NPI 18 November 1860. Conversion of Mária Bimbó from the Helvetian faith. Examination of the documents filed under *Conversi et apostatae* in the Vác Episcopal and Capitular Archive produced further data to supplement the information gained from material in the local parish.

28 NPI Widow Mrs. Sándor Plachner née Emilia Nádasdi Sárközy, widow of the chief notary of Somogy County, 17 March 1926; Mrs József Krómer née Valéria Dencsi 20 November 1928.

29 NPI Widow Mrs János Ballai née Mária Soós, 9 October 1891.



Lutheran religion in 1912, at the age of twenty.<sup>30</sup> Mária Valéria Krómer was christened at the age of ten, two years after her mother converted.<sup>31</sup> Their Roman Catholic husbands and brothers-in-law were the witnesses at the conversions of Terézia and Ilona Kőrös. The process had to be speeded up because one of the young women was pregnant and, according to the letters of mutual concession, the child would have had to follow its mother's religion.<sup>32</sup> Sándor Sütő who was born in Kiskunhalas took the decision to change denomination because of his Csongrád Catholic fiancée.<sup>33</sup> The wife and daughter of Ferenc Vattay, who was born in Törökszentmiklós and converted in 1934, were Roman Catholics.<sup>34</sup>

A number of persons returned to their original religion in their old age, after the death of their spouses. When Mihály Martinek's wife died, "it removed the last obstacle" in the way of returning to the Roman Catholic religion he had left before his marriage.<sup>35</sup> Four other women also took the decision to change denomination after their spouses died.

In the period examined the ministers in Szentes issued the legally required dismissal letters in a total of three cases. The certificates typically had to be drawn up and signed by the two witnesses: if they were unable to read and write they turned to the Roman Catholic presbytery in Szentes where the priest or one of the assistants came to their help. The reason for refusal can be sensed behind the case of the conversion in 1872 of Mihály Bozsik, a soldier. The Szentes parish priest made the following report to the vicar forane:

"The Szentes minister János Filó, angrily attacked the two witnesses, using unseemly expressions: he declared that he does not recognise Mihály Bozsik as a member of his congregation because the Calvinists in Csongrád do not belong to the Helvetian religious community in Szentes. Besides, the person concerned should apply to the representative in Csongrád or go to Kecskemét."<sup>36</sup>

It seems very likely that the substance of this declaration did not reach the faithful in Csongrád, as no example was found of anyone travelling to Kecskemét in the matter of their conversion.

Examining the persons of the witnesses we find that if a young woman of Calvinist religion converted to the Catholic faith of her husband, she was accompanied to the minister by her father-in-law or brother-in-law. It is also typical that women friends served as witnesses for women, but there are no records of female witnesses for men. Anyone who was unable or unwilling to take witnesses from

30 NPI Erzsébet, Terézia and Ferenc Budai, children of Mihály Budai and Teréz Leirer, 18 January 1915.

31 NPI Mária Valéria Krómer, 26 August 1930.

32 NPI Mrs József Papp née Ilona Kőrös and Mrs Rókus Győri née Terézia Kőrös, 30 July 1931.

33 NPI Sándor Sütő, 1 November 1875, 16 November.

34 NPI Ferenc Vattay, 28 March 1934

35 NPI Mihály Martinek, 24 April 1933.

36 NPI Mihály Bozsik, 23 October 1872; 2 February 1873.

Csongrád went out to the market in Szentes to find someone willing to perform the task. This is what Márton Lucza, a navy did in 1882; the minister “as usual” dismissed him, but his witnesses were illiterate and were unable to write the certificate. When they realised this, the group dispersed, the witnesses returned to their business. The validity of the first declaration was confirmed by the second witnesses.<sup>37</sup> The documents also suggest the presence of a “specialist” figure: Mátyás Juhász must have acquired a reputation as someone who knew how such a statement must be made, what had to be done and how to formulate the certificate. The experience of such a witness must have strengthened the courage of anyone considering a change of denomination.

In the following we examine how many persons in Csongrád decided to leave the Roman Catholic Church. From the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to 1937 a total of five women and ten men converted to the Calvinist Church. Three of the women from Csongrád moved to Szentes as brides, two of the men had settled far from their place of birth. The Csongrád parish priest was informed after the conversion. In the other ten cases we find older people, in their fifties and sixties, who decided to change denomination. In the case of Rozália Fekete it could be worth mentioning that she became a Lutheran in order to be able to obtain a divorce from her first husband more easily. However, she never practised her new religion and as she approached death she wanted to return to the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>38</sup>

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On the whole it can be said that in the majority of cases the Roman Catholic Church in Csongrád absorbed new arrivals, typically Protestants born elsewhere. Joining the Catholic Church was a step of key importance for the integration of persons regarded as rootless outsiders. It signalled their readiness to remove obstacles in the way of their integration and their desire to participate in the important occasions of community representation, solemn church feasts and holy mass. It also reflects the desire to overcome at least part of the multiple social handicaps (for example, in the case of Calvinist orphans). If someone was born elsewhere, or born out of wedlock, or was an orphan, such circumstances could not be changed – but denominational allegiance could be.

It can also be seen that there are many young people, single girls and young men in their twenties, who decided to change their religion or denomination. In Csongrád, belonging to the Protestant congregation significantly reduced the chances of marrying: mixed marriages were the least favoured. In the case of such a marriage, the Letters of Mutual Concession were always made out in favour of the Catholic partner, children born of the marriage would all be Catholics. Older women and widows are the other typical group: when pressure from the family or spouse ceased, they immediately decided to make the gesture of assimilation, and shed the burden of otherness. The transition was significantly facilitated by

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37 NPI Márton Lucza, 2 November; 6 November 1882.

38 NPI Rozália Fekete, 18 August; 6 September 1927.

the fact that for Calvinists in Csongrád there were serious obstacles to practising their faith: they could attend religious services only in Szentes but that town was too far away to make the journey every week.

How little pull the Protestant churches had on Csongrád could be seen very clearly in the 1890s. At that time the town's Roman Catholic priest was a man with political ambitions and a forceful, difficult personality who strongly divided the faithful: they either hated or adored Antal Hegyi. There were even some who were so dissatisfied with the parish priest that they left the Roman Catholic Church. In 1897–98 a total of 11 people took this step, nine of them expressing their intention on the same day, in a group.<sup>39</sup> Another denomination was not an alternative for these disenchanted individuals.

It can be said that those who converted to the Roman Catholic Church in Csongrád made a declaration of intent to the community: they left behind what they could, their religion, the sign of their otherness and status as an outsider. In the absence of opportunities, their ties to their religion had worn thin and before the Csongrád Calvinist Church was built in 1937 they had very little chance of nurturing and strengthening those ties.

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## LITTLE APOSTLES OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

**Abstract:** According to the promises of the Sacred Heart, He will protect and bless those who honour Him. As the children's branch of the Society of the Sacred Heart, the most important aims of the Apostleship of Prayer were: atonement of the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the hearts of children, to raise better, more loving-hearted children, to act as apostles to adults by and through children, to participate in the community of virtue and prayer of the universal church. Publications associated with veneration of the Sacred Heart mingled the traditional world-view image with the post-Enlightenment world-view. Religious answers given to the social and economic problems reflected the responses of other rival world-views and societies of the age. The proposed answers to social problems included the idea of saving the nation through the Sacred Heart.

**Keywords:** Sacred Heart, Apostleship of Prayer, childhood education

Following the Enlightenment, the role of the Catholic Church underwent increasing change. This was accompanied by the rationalisation of religion, in which earlier superstitions were removed from the official practice.<sup>2</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century rationalisation went together with an indifference to religion. The clergy saw the cause of this in the "spirit of the age". The gradual shift away from the churches must be seen as a long historical process<sup>3</sup>, according to some in the western literature it is a phenomenon of the modern age. However, they agree that it is not a linear process, but rather a cyclical fluctuation of religious crises and revival movements.<sup>4</sup> Placing the schools under state supervision strengthened the process. However, for the masses estrangement from the church was not a programme but the result of indifference.<sup>5</sup> The church had to face a number of competing world-views. At the same time if the church was to address the faithful more effectively it needed to make use of the increasingly important forums that the "opponents of the church"<sup>6</sup> – by their own admission – were using to gradually and imperceptibly alienate believers from religion.<sup>7</sup> The Jesuits wanted to use the

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2 See: DÜLMEN 2005. 137–267.

3 See: KÓSA 2002. 250.

4 See: ALTERMATT 2001. 15.

5 See: KÓSA 2002.252.

6 In the words of Pope Leo XIII.

7 See: KLESTENITZ 2013. 32.

mass media to counterbalance the alienating influence on youth and the intelligentsia.<sup>8</sup> This aspiration can be observed later too, for example, in the columns for children in *The Heart* paper established in 1915.

### Child education and society

According to Ariès, a change occurred from the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the way children were seen; a new word usage appeared among the bourgeoisie, “childhood” was restricted to its present meaning.<sup>9</sup> The concept of childhood innocence also appeared as a fundamental notion.<sup>10</sup> According to Linda Pollock and later Shulamith Shahar, this did not mean that earlier ages had been indifferent to children. At the same time infant mortality was very high right up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to hygienic conditions, epidemics, the way of life and the undeveloped state of medical science.<sup>11</sup>

In traditional societies the child learnt the norms, rites and customs within the family, in the course of socialisation. These included the religious knowledge and practices of the family and immediate community.<sup>12</sup> The child was seen as the guarantee of the community’s future and correct education was therefore held to be important. This was not just the internal affair of the family: for a long while it was under community control.<sup>13</sup> However, the “religious indifference” of adults also influenced the children’s education. Placing schools under state supervision was also part of the process of secularisation. The church schools were often accused of being outdated.<sup>14</sup> The migration of young people to the towns and the radical change this brought in the way of life, their escape from community control, the socio-economic changes and mixed marriages also caused a change in the regulating role of religion. By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century people turned to the church only at the major milestones in human life.<sup>15</sup> From the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century religion was increasingly relegated to private life and the events of confraternities.<sup>16</sup> As a consequence, children did not necessarily learn the religious rites at home or were not familiar with the basic teachings of the Bible. This problem also appeared in the interwar years. Religious institutions and societies took over the religious education of children. This was also the case of the Apostleship of Prayer, a religious organisation for children aged 6 to 14 honouring the Sacred Heart of Jesus, established in Szeged in 1920 but also operating throughout the country.

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8 See: KLESTENITZ 2013. 93.

9 See: ARIÈS 1987. 26.

10 See: ARIÈS 1987. 26.143.

11 See: DEÁKY 2011. 21–22.

12 See: DEÁKY 2011. 191. See also: Kresz, Fél

13 See: DEÁKY 2011.10–11.

14 See: KÓSA 2002. 256.

15 See: KÓSA 2002. 252.

16 See: KAPITÁNY – KAPITÁNY 2007. 383–384.

## Secular problems, eschatological responses

The activity of the Apostleship of Prayer can be interpreted within the frame of the “Catholic renaissance” that unfolded as a revival movement from the 1890s. In addition to the education of children in a religious spirit, the aim of the Apostleship of Prayer was for children to become little apostles who would lead their immediate environment back to the church. The prayer apostle “practices virtues corresponding to his age and is diligent in prayer to establish the country of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in his own heart and also in the souls of others.”<sup>17</sup> They traced the importance of a religious education for children and their role in apostleship back to the Gospel of Mark: “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.”<sup>18</sup>

By giving children a religious education in the Apostleship of Prayer, an attempt was also made to offer a solution to the social problems of the age: “As a consequence of excessive intellectuality, modern teachings alienate hearts from God and the transcendent – and rivalry, jostling, class struggles separate human hearts from each other. The practical veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus remedies these two troubles: it teaches love as well as the other virtues (dutifulness, the readiness to make sacrifices, humility) in the spirit of love, making them pleasant and attractive to children. And for transcendent reasons the grace that derives from honouring the Sacred Heart will help them overcome the difficulties that we are unable to cope with in our helplessness under the present grave circumstances.”<sup>19</sup> In this way they attempted to remedy through children the alienation from religion. Ferenc Bíró S.J. also stressed the importance of veneration of the Sacred Heart in connection with the solution of social problems: “it is this devotion that offers society and the church the hope of escaping the present catastrophic problems”, then added: “there is a place and need for all other devotions too, but all other devotions are only a means, a path.”<sup>20</sup>

The solution of social and economic problems through veneration of the Sacred Heart was also a response to other rival ideologies of the time, especially the left-wing movements that also made efforts to win over children. Lajos Farkas reported on this in 1943: “The liquidation of the socialist children’s association was a big achievement of the Szeged Apostleship. The ‘Friends of Children’ kept the many children veritable captives with weekly activities, language lessons, general knowledge talks, films and public lectures, and finally with gift parcels. Its advantage was that its headquarters were close to the school. The Apostleship counterbalanced this with regular weekly collections, rewards, performances, that is, by very similar means. Here, rewards were given only for honest work which

17 ZsÍROS 1935. 25–26.

18 Mk 10, 14–16.

19 N.N. 1929. 10.

20 Bíró 1932. 4.



encouraged serious activity on the part of the young apostles.”<sup>21</sup> This struggle grew even more intense after 1945, then in 1948 ended with the dissolution of the Apostleship of Prayer. György Alaker S.J., national director of the Apostleship wrote in 1946 to the bishop setting out his concerns in this connection: “It would be a great help for the apostles if some support of benefit for the children could be obtained through the Apostleship from large-scale foreign charity campaigns. However, despite repeated attempts there has been no success in this direction. But the greatest percentage of members of the Apostleship are the children of families living in poverty. Given that the Pioneers operate with great material aid, there is a danger that they will win over many apostles if the Apostleship is unable to provide any form of material assistance for its members.”<sup>22</sup>

Mária Blaskó wrote the story “Silver tray, red heart” for the Apostleship of Prayer as a reflection on the social problems of the time and to strengthen the children’s social sensitivity. The hero is a young apostle who is outstanding in all areas but held himself to be better than others and looked down on his fellows he considered to be of less value regarding their social status, origin or material worth and less skilful. As punishment he was unable to present his heart to the Infant Jesus – in the words of the angel of the story – “the silver tray on which we offer our heart to Jesus is love of our fellow men. Alas, Little Peti, you do not have such love. Because you must love everyone, even those who others unjustly do not love.”<sup>23</sup>

The young apostles also strove to help solve problems with prayers. The monthly prayer intentions received from the religious instructors and the prayers in the Sacred Heart calendar were followed by brief moral stories and explanations to ensure that the children understood the essence of the prayer intention. For example, in the 1940-41 school year the following intentions (among others) were set: may the sinners, believers in false faiths, and those with no faith be converted; may all Christian families be religious in an exemplary way; may there be many, zealous and holy priests and may the Lord’s blessing be on them; may there be peace in hearts, in families, between peoples and countries, everywhere.<sup>24</sup> These prayer intentions generally coincided with the intention of the Pope.

In the 1937-38 school year the young apostles took part in the prayer campaign of the holy year; on request they prayed for sick persons and the dying. According to the teacher’s account, after a while the help given with prayer by the children of Szeged-rókus proved to be so effective that people close to the teachers and the children also asked them to pray for help in problems (sickness, work, financial problems).<sup>25</sup> There were also cases where they sought the help of the Apostleship in the hope of a good death. The children met the requests sent to them in writing:

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21 FARKAS 1943. 15.

22 Documents of the Szeged-Csanád Diocesan Archive (SZCSEL) Documents, 2293/46.

23 BLASKÓ 1944. 42.

24 See: BLASKÓ 1940. 62–76.

25 Chronicle of 6 Apostleship of Prayer groups in the Szeged-rókus state elementary school, Vol. II. p. 70. 1938–1939 school year. Jesuit Archive and Library on the History of the Order, II. 4.5.

"The next letter in fact reported on a good death. The Lord heard the children's prayer; they did not want to ask for something in general but came before their heavenly father in concrete matters..."<sup>26</sup> Intercession through prayer supposes an active image of God. Within the Catholic renaissance in the interwar years we can observe a return to a pre-Enlightenment, traditional world-view, mingled with the modern ideals of the period. Imhof has shown that "the embeddedness of the life of our predecessors in the notions of Christian faith – however far they were from the official views – always also meant that their own little world, their microcosm, was part of a larger world. [...] The microcosm was part of the macrocosm, hundreds and thousands of little worlds were nestled in the big world that united everything, and according to the Christian ideas this world rested in the protecting arms of the all-powerful God."<sup>27</sup> This world-view closely resembles the way Sándor Bálint wrote about the "world-view of the old peasantry": "While the urban dweller tended to attribute unexpected, strange or surprising turns in his life to chance, the peasant soul saw symbolic meaning, divine inspiration or even command in them: God directs people's lives with signs. [...] God's angels and saints are always ready to be at people's service, to smooth out their problems."<sup>28</sup> Because, as the gospel said, children were especially dear to Jesus,<sup>29</sup> they were regarded as suitable for interceding before God in the interest of adults. The intercession of children – their role as intermediary – can be regarded as similar to the ritual power of those outside the social structure or at the bottom of the social hierarchy, what Turner calls the "power of the weak".<sup>30</sup>

Children's societies similar to the Apostleship of Prayer were also established in other countries. Despite this, Dömjén Szabó O.F.M. considered it important to emphasise the Hungarian origin and character of the Apostleship of Prayer: "The Apostleship of Prayer is dear to us because it is a truly Hungarian patent. It was invented by a Hungarian brain, it developed in Hungarian soil, it was sprinkled by Hungarian tears and warmed by the sun of love from Hungarian hearts."<sup>31</sup> This was written in Kolozsvár/Cluj – that was already beyond the border at that time – but similar opinions can be found in other authors. In addition to the national character of the Apostleship of Prayer, great emphasis was also placed on the dedication of the country to the Sacred Heart of Jesus by Francis Joseph during the First World War. With reference to this the devotees of the Sacred Heart of Jesus – among them the young apostles – repeatedly prayed to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the salvation and resurrection of the country, by which they understood territorial revision.<sup>32</sup> Denominational interpretations in Hungary at that

26 Chronicle of 6 Apostleship of Prayer groups in the Szeged-rókus state elementary school, Vol. II. p. 74. 1938–1939 school year. Jesuit Archive and Library on the History of the Order, II. 4.5.

27 IMHOF 1992. 23–24.

28 Bálint 1981. 39.

29 Mk. 10, 14–16.

30 TURNER 2002. 126.

31 SZABÓ 1930. 161.

32 With the Trianon Peace Dictate in 1920, Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory and more than half its population. More than one-third of the Hungarian-speaking population came under the jurisdiction of foreign states.

time regarded the peace dictate that ended the First World War as divine punishment for the religious indifference observed earlier in Hungarian society, similar to the destruction of the Sanctuary in Jerusalem in the Ancient World and the scattering of the chosen people. This is why the children's apostolic tasks included "offering recompense for the sins of the Hungarians" and "through veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus by little Hungarians to appease the Heart of the Lord punishing the Hungarian people."<sup>33</sup> According to the formulation of this in a way that children could understand, the First World War and the subsequent peace treaty happened because people sinned and turned away from God. The thought of doing penance for sin and cutting short the war in this way appeared already in publications during the First World War.<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusions

The aim of the Apostleship of Prayer movement in the interwar years was practical religious education for children. In the publications intended for the children and the Apostleship leaders, modern, rational ideals of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries mingled with the pre-Enlightenment world-view. It is in this way we can interpret the aspiration that children could help to solve the social and economic problems of their age through their veneration of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, their prayers and apostleship. However, the children's principal apostolic task was to lead their immediate environment back to religion and the church community. To achieve this the young apostle first of all offered himself to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; at the same time, because the local and national leaders of the Apostleship regarded the family as the basic unit of society, they also urged families to offer themselves too. In many families it was also the children who could achieve this. The dedication of families was also linked to the notion of "saving the nation" because the possibility for the salvation ("resurrection") of the homeland was seen through Christian families.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> N.N. 1929. 13.

<sup>34</sup> N.N. 1915. – see illustration No. 1.

<sup>35</sup> MIHALOVICS 1942. 42–43.

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Ph. Schumacher.

## **Elő akarod-e segíteni a háború szerencsés befejezését?**

**E kérdés miatt nagyot nézesz és sóhajtasz:  
Bár elősegíthetném! De hát én nem vagyok  
hadvezér, hogy csapatainkat döntő győzelemre  
vezethetném, sem államférfiú nem vagyok, hogy**  
**13430**

First World War propaganda publication, 1915.





Young apostles in Szeged praying the rosary. Source: Jesuit Archive and Library of the History of the Order, II. 4.5.



Young apostles in Szeged praying for peace. Source: Jesuit Archive and Library of the History of the Order, II. 4.5.





Let us pray for good Hungarian priests! Child's drawing. Source: Jesuit Archive and Library of the History of the Order, II. 4.5.

## THE APPEARANCE OF FOLK EMBROIDERIES ON LITURGICAL TEXTILES OF ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN HUNGARY

**Abstract:** A slow but far-reaching reform began in the liturgy of the Catholic Church from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One of the principal aims was to involve the faithful in the life and liturgy of the Church. Innovations were initiated for example in the order of the mass, its language, the provision of the sacraments, the formation of the liturgical space and the textiles used in the liturgies. The Second Vatican Council accepted the reforms and as a result they spread rapidly throughout the world from the end of the 1960s. After a brief introduction on the historical background the study attempts to answer the question of why a relatively new form of folk embroidery, *Kalocsa embroidery*, was the first to appear on the renewed liturgical textiles of the Catholic Church. The author also presents a few of the first textiles decorated with Kalocsa embroidery.

**Keywords:** Catholic Church, liturgical reform; liturgical textile; folk embroidery; Kalocsa embroidery, influence of the Second Vatican Council

Works of art have accompanied Christianity throughout the two thousand years of its history. These works represent values that make the mystery of Christ and the Church tangible; they were created by men but speak of God and to God; they are visible but transmit invisible goods; they are the result of activity but invite contemplation; they are born in this world but point to Heaven. Over the centuries countless works of art have been produced in the fields of architecture, painting, sculpture, artistic metalwork, book art, music, poetry and other branches of art. During the Middle Ages, art, whether individual or collective, largely served the official and public cult of the Church, the *liturgy*.

In the Roman Catholic Church these works of art were created mainly by men. However, there are areas of *sacral art* in which women were also active. One such area was the making of textiles used in the liturgy. In the monastic or beguine communities following various rules great emphasis was placed on manual work, in many places especially on handwork, the making of “*things for the holy church, works and ornaments for the relics of saints*”.<sup>1</sup> Although the special fabrics, such as silk, brocade and velvet, were procured through merchants, they were able to make most of the materials used, linens and threads of various quality.<sup>2</sup> The

1 ÉRSZEGI 1987. 113.

2 The legend recording the life of Saint Margaret of Hungary, for example, mentions a *beguine* called *Méza* who earned her living making gold thread. ÉRSZEGI 1987. 163. For more details on the beguine communities, see: MEZEY, László 1955.

*beguines* and nuns making *liturgical textiles* did embroideries not only for their own church or the male monasteries belonging to their order but also for “outside clients”. They made the vestments worn by preaching orders (*surplices, stoles, albs, cinctures, maniples, dalmatics, chasubles, copes, humeral veils, episcopal tunics, birettas, bishops’ mitres*), and the textiles decorating the altar and other liturgical places (*antependia, altar cloths, chalice veils, corporals* placed beneath the chalice, *palls* and *burses* covering the chalice) and the *banners* used in processions, observing the universal rules applying to the Church everywhere, but also taking into account local characteristics, demands and possibilities. The donations in money or kind received for the handwork helped to maintain the everyday life of their community. Presumably kings and queens, aristocrats and their wives also donated such convent embroideries to the churches they founded or supported.

Most of these works were destroyed during the 150 years of Turkish rule. After the expulsion of the Turks, from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century work began on reconstruction of the previously occupied territories. The entire structure of the Catholic Church had to be organised, new churches erected in place of those that had been destroyed, and equipped with the articles needed for the liturgy. In the resettled towns and villages, and in the clusters of houses on the plains gradually becoming settlements, supporting the local church was no longer the exclusive privilege of the landowner. Couples and families that gradually became prosperous through farming followed the centuries-old examples and either individually or together with other families donated objects to this “sanctified world” – paintings, statues, crosses, stations of the cross, pews, glass windows, vestments or altar cloths.

“We now know that some of our folk embroideries are of church (convent) origin. (...) We now know that the symbols used by the Church for the decoration of churches often find their way into folk art where they undergo distinctive further development,” wrote Sándor Bálint in *Népünk ünnepei* [Feasts of our people].<sup>3</sup> This process can undoubtedly be traced in various areas of material culture: in peasant architecture, the interiors of homes, items of furniture, on textiles made for various occasions. Among Catholics for a long while this reception was a one-way process, it could not operate in the opposite direction towards the Church. While right from the time of their establishment the Protestant churches not only addressed followers in the vernacular language but also incorporated folk art into their own culture (it is sufficient to think of their painted wooden ceilings and their altar cloths), for a long while the Catholic Church jealously guarded its uniform, universal culture developed over centuries.

However, the *liturgical reform* that unfolded from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century set off slow but far-reaching changes in the life of the Catholic Church that culminated in the *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Litany of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).<sup>4</sup> The renewal movement began

3 BÁLINT 1938.

4 Full text in Hungarian: CSERHÁTI – FÁBIÁN (eds.) 1992. 106-128.

in Belgium and the Netherlands, then quickly spread to Germany, Austria, Italy, Spain and England. It was principally received and spread in their environment by the Benedictine abbeys. The main aim of the reform was to involve believers in the life of the Church; to achieve this it called for innovations, among many other areas, in the order of the mass, its language, and the provision of the sacraments. From the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century the new trend gradually spread into Hungary too.

*"The many centuries-old Roman liturgy is a veritable work of art: it is like a majestic dome, a decorative garment, beautiful lace, enchanting rhythm, perfect art, order and beauty, the most fitting that can be given to God. Nevertheless, however much peoples and ideals have built on it and beautified it over the centuries, it became increasingly cold and foreign,"* wrote Bishop Gyula Szakos and Antal Várnagy, professor of liturgy in an analysis presenting the Constitution on the *Sacred Litany* of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>5</sup> The coldness and alienation that gradually developed over the centuries was dangerous for the Church because it could lead to the loss of the essential element of the litany, life. For this reason, an important element of the liturgical movement was the active participation of believers in liturgical celebration, a return to the apostolic age and the traditions of the early church. The correctly experienced liturgy is not a thing of beauty for its own sake, it serves a purpose: personal encounter and intimate communion with God in Christ and with each other in the church of Christ. This encounter can be helped (but not replaced) by external factors such as the church building and its furnishings, the works of art and objects used in the course of the mass. The prelates who joined the movement encouraged those entrusted to their care to draw on their own endowments to enrich their communities so that *life* can be returned also to liturgical celebration. They made it possible for *"the characteristic endowments and heritage of different peoples and nations"*<sup>6</sup> to be incorporated into the life of the local church, for the objects, vestments and textiles to be adapted in material and form to local characteristics and for local traditions and motifs to be used in their ornamentation. It became possible not only for professional artists commissioned by the Church and persons in the church but also for the laity, ordinary believers belonging to the local community to take part in shaping the community space, furnishing it and providing it with objects.

Precisely at the time this liturgical renewal appeared in Hungary a new embroidery culture was emerging in Kalocsa, seat of the historical archbishopric of Kalocsa<sup>7</sup> and in the surrounding scattered settlements. In 1935 in an introduction to her study on *The Origin and Development of Kalocsa Embroidery* Irma Eckert wrote: *"Since it is only in the last two years that the more educated classes in Kalocsa have taken note of this art – and only when it had spread in its full splendour and individual features – many mistaken opinions have been formed of it. It is compared to this*

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5 CSERHÁTI – FÁBIÁN (eds.) 1992. 91.

6 CSERHÁTI – FÁBIÁN (eds.) 1992. 112.

7 The Kalocsa archbishopric was one of the first dioceses in Hungary. It was founded by King Saint Stephen in the year 1000.



or that folk art, its centuries-old past, its Slav or Sárköz origin are debated. The two years I have spent collecting data and material have convinced me that there is no need to seek such romantic paths leading back to the original homeland. Like the other folk-style arts, this too emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and much later than its relatives flourishing in various parts of the country, and so it is the youngest branch on the vast trunk of Hungarian folk art. (...) According to the confessions of the oldest women, there was no folk art of any kind in Kalocsa and the surrounding area 70–80 years ago.”<sup>8</sup>

It can be said that *Kalocsa embroidery*, now known throughout the world and often identified with Hungarian folk art, did not begin to emerge until the 1860s and 1870s. The first *needlewomen* who created the embroidery did not compose patterns drawn from ancient motifs or use independently designed patterns but, instead, went to the workshop of a local master, Ferenc Szeidler, to have patterns *stamped*. And the master only had patterns that met the demands of the middle class and reflected bourgeois taste. Up to that time it had been urban middle-class women who ordered the pre-printed patterns from him that were then often sent to women living in the scattered settlements around Kalocsa who were paid to do the embroidery. These peasant women ordered patterns from Szeidler for themselves too, and following bourgeois taste, imitated them using exclusively white thread for *cut-work*, *scallop-stitched* embroidery with a few stem-stitched motifs. At times it was difficult to reach the town from the outlying settlements and the stamping also cost money, so one or two skilful women tried drawing the patterns at home. They copied the *catfish*, *plum stone*, *winged roses*, *hearts*, *pears*, *rose-mary*, *roses turned to the sun*, *peacock tail* and other motifs with fantasy names seen from the urban master into their own pattern books. They then copied motifs from the pattern books almost unchanged onto the white, factory-made *cambric* for the other local women.<sup>9</sup>

The first step in further development of the embroidery was when they used satin stitch to fill in leaves in place of cut-work. The embroidery thread remained white but the original cut-work was increasingly replaced by satin stitch. In the 1890s pure black thread came to be used as well as white, then dark blue and red appeared, and these colours were used to complement each other as well. Either motifs placed side by side were embroidered alternately in black, red and blue, or two colours were used within a *wreath*.<sup>10</sup>

Beside the first pattern drawers, known in Hungarian as *íróasszonyok* (writing women), a new generation was brought up and became independent pattern drawers who did not follow so closely the “tradition” of pre-printed Szeidler patterns. Together with the old motifs they enriched their pattern books with new motifs seen elsewhere: wheat, tulips, lilies, roses in numerous versions.<sup>11</sup> They often took motifs from factory-made textiles imported to Hungary from other

<sup>8</sup> ECKERT 1935. 56. 61.

<sup>9</sup> For more detail, see: ECKERT 1935; 1936.

<sup>10</sup> For more detail, see: BÁRTH 1978.

<sup>11</sup> The stylised flowers were generally called simply roses. Descriptive adjectives were added to distinguish between the different roses.

regions of Europe, but sooner or later these were adapted to the taste of the local community and the world they saw around themselves. They also began to use new colours, although they were more restrained than the later range of bright colours. Beside the white, black, dark blue and red, the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the appearance of wine-red, yellow and then “dull” green.

The years following the First World War brought more change. In courses organised by the National Cottage Industry Federation in the 1910s women in Kalocsa too learnt to do machine embroidery, English Madeira and Richelieu embroidery that was another big influence on the local embroidery culture. Around this time Hungarian aristocratic and bourgeois circles began to show greater interest in folk art. The Kalocsa needlewomen and their daughters received more and more orders through the Federation and embroidery became a source of income for growing numbers. Under the influence of the *Gyöngyösbokréta* (Pearly Bouquet) movement launched in 1931, folk dance groups were formed in Kalocsa and the surrounding villages and scattered settlements. Increasingly spectacular costumes embroidered with bigger, brighter-coloured flowers were made for the groups’ performances. The earlier designs using two or three colours with motifs arranged in relatively narrow bands underwent a transformation: they became wider and spread out over larger areas. The embroiders used many colours and also began to use different shades of the colours. They tried to fill the whole surface with embroidered and Richelieu flowers arranged in bouquets. Besides the countless floral motifs of the so-called *cifrapamukos* (fancy threads) embroidery using close to thirty different colours, a new kind of embroidery known as *szo-morúpamukos* (sorrowful threads) developed with more restrained colours in shades of blue, purple, yellow, green and occasionally wine-red. However, these patterns and colours were often intended only for the outside world, for clients. The embroidered textiles with pre-drawn patterns for their own use were often much simpler than the ones made for sale.

The *House of Folk Art* set up in Kalocsa in 1936 became the centre of folk-art goods production, and as such was even more influential in making the most recent style of Kalocsa embroidery developed under external influences known throughout the country and later also Europe – together with the Matyó and Kalotaszeg embroidery. After the Second World War this fame became even greater and can be said to exist even today.

The process of the emergence and development of Kalocsa folk embroidery coincided with the start and unfolding of the reform movement in the Catholic Church. The effect of this renewal trend was increasingly felt after the years of the First World War. The Hungarian Catholic Bishops’ Conference had not yet embraced it at that time but did not ban the introduction of minor innovations. How much the attempts at innovation were allowed inside the church depended on the local clergy. This was the case in Kalocsa and the surrounding scattered settlements too. This coincidence in time created the possibility for Kalocsa embroidery to appear on textiles in churches in Hungary, relatively soon after its development.

The *Máriácska* (*Little Mary*) cloth from Résztelek preserved in the ethnographic collection of the Viski Károly Museum illustrates the initial period of *Kalocsa embroidery*. Judging by its name it must have been used beneath a statue of the Virgin Mary. Its maker edged one side of the white linen with a simple hem and decorated the other three sides with minute cut-work embroidery. The pattern drawer designed a daisy with a spider stitched centre in each scallop and above it a four-leaved clover. The cloth is embroidered entirely in white with mainly cut-work, it is only in the finely curved stems from the daisies and clover that stem stitch is used. There is no sacral reference in any of the motifs of the *Máriácska cloth*. It most closely resembles the *sideboard cloths* made at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup>

The motifs sewn in black, red and blue representing the second stage in the development of Kalocsa embroidery are not found among the liturgical textiles. However, the Viski Károly Museum preserves many pieces made especially for church use from the subsequent period marked by a much wider range of colours, and there is hardly a Catholic church in Hungary today that does not have an altar cloth or vestment decorated with Kalocsa embroidery. The reason for this must be sought in the fact that it was precisely in the period of the “discovery” and flowering of Kalocsa folk art that it became possible to include certain details of local folk tradition into the liturgy of the Catholic Church and among the decorations of liturgical textiles. Perhaps we are not mistaken if, beside this door opened wide by the Catholic Church we add the awareness of themselves as folk artists of the Kalocsa women who had been embroidering quietly for their own pleasure and on work for bourgeois ladies, an awareness that was strengthened by the influence of the Pearly Bouquet movement. The cooperation of such creative individuals and representatives of the Church was needed for works serving liturgical purposes and decorated with Kalocsa embroidery to be produced and now occupy a place in all Roman Catholic churches in Hungary.

Among the original pieces drawn by “writing women” and embroidered by local women are the church textiles made in *Alsómégy* and now in the ethnographic collection of the Viski Károly Museum in Kalocsa: altar cloths, veils, narrow cloths for side altars and statues, church banners. These textiles inspired by folk art are highly varied. Some are pure white, others coloured, with crocheted or madeira edges, decorated with cut-work and Richelieu work. What they all have in common is that in colour and form they represent the “most recent style”. Some pieces have the date they were made embroidered on them. An *altar cloth* made in 1933 clearly reflects individual experimentation. The *Sacred Heart motif* placed in the centre is not a local design: the local “writing woman” probably copied it unchanged from a pattern used by the Catholic Church. She supplemented this with her own design, arranging Kalocsa flowers in garlands (in bands around the edge of the cloth) and in bouquets. In keeping with the “new style” these flowers were large and spread out, but not as crowded as in the compositions of later years. The

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12 See: LENGYEL 1983. 21-24.



colours are still quite restrained. Two pleasingly harmonised shades each of light blue, pink, purple, yellow and green were used to embroider the vegetal motifs. Red and wine-red appear only on the *Sacred Heart motif*. A bunch of forget-me-nots tied with ribbons in the national colours placed symmetrically on either side of the heart is an individual solution. The edge of the cloth is emphasised with crocheted lace.

The *banners* made scarcely three years later, in 1936 are representatives of the fully developed “most recent style”. In the centre is the *Sacred Heart* familiar from the altar cloth, encircled with a crown of thorns, and the related *Sacred Heart of Virgin Mary* in a wreath of roses. The hearts are clearly not rooted in Kalocsa folk art; instead the designer must have copied them from an already existing liturgical textile used by the Church further away in time and space. But the compositions surrounding the hearts in a horseshoe shape, arranged in bouquets and sewn with *sorrowful threads* reflect the local stock of patterns. The arrangement of the forget-me-nots like bunches of grapes on either side of the bouquets and the two tiny motifs of cross and grapes in the machine-sewn Richelieu edging a handbreadth wide around the banner are drawn from the stock of Christian motifs, intended to strengthen the ecclesiastical character of the banners.

Liturgical textiles from the *Szalmár* church now in the Kalocsa museum, were also made in the 1930s. The vestments comprising *stole*, *chasuble*, *humeral veil* and *cope* as well as chalice veil and burse are uniform in material and motifs. Each piece in the collection embroidered with *fancy threads* on a white silk fabric has been minutely worked with great skill. A narrow garland runs around the edges of the *chasuble* and because, until the resolution of the Second Vatican Council, priests prepared the offertory with their backs to the congregation, the back of the *chasuble* was decorated with a three-part wreath in the form of a cross. In the centre of the cross an IHS inscription has been embroidered in gold, surrounded with forget-me-not tendrils. A gold-coloured, factory-made silk fringe has been sewn on the two ends of the *humeral veil*, above it is a narrow and a wide garland band. In the centre is the same IHS inscription as on the *chasuble*, set in a wreath. In the space between the wreaths, following the crosses woven into the white silk fabric, each row is decorated with three or four *scattered flowers*. Perhaps the most striking piece in the collection is the *cope*. A narrow band of *tendrils* runs around the edges of the *cope* which is open in the front and held in place with a clasp. On both sides of the front this band widens into a three-part wreath. The spectacular wreath in the shape of a shield decorating the back, embroidered on a separate piece of textile, is also arranged in three parts. The priest wore the *chasuble only for the mass*. The *humeral veil* was worn on the shoulders when setting out the offertory, *for blessing with the Eucharist* or in procession to cover the hands holding the *monstrance*. The *cope* was worn, besides for mass, at solemn ceremonies – litany, exposition of the sacrament, in processions, and when administering the sacraments of christening and marriage. This “collection” from Szalmár is a fine example of how local folk art – in the present case an embroidery culture – can be incorporated into the sacral art of the universal church.

The “mother church” of the Kalocsa folk artists is the Saint Emmerich parish church in Eperföld, consecrated in 1933. Many valuable liturgical textiles are preserved here and are still in use. All of these pieces are representatives of the “most recent style”. A good number of them are linked to the names of two outstanding individuals in the world of Kalocsa embroidery, *Mrs János Kovács née Ilus Király* (1886-1966) and *Mrs Lajos András née Julis Piris* (1900-1987). They drew the patterns for the veils, altar cloths and banners that were later embroidered by skilful needlewomen attending the church. The work of the “writing women” and needlewomen with ties to the parish gained new impetus in 1969 when Géza Antal, who was fond of Kalocsa embroidery, became their parish priest. “Father Géza’s” love of folk art and the mandatory liturgical reforms introduced throughout the country in the wake of the Second Vatican Council came together in a fortunate encounter in the Eperföld parish. Under the influence of the reforms, not only the interior arrangement of the church and the liturgy but also some of the textiles used in the ceremonies had to be changed.

On 9 November 1969, on the day of the church feast, the new altar facing the congregation was consecrated. For the occasion the women had prepared a special surprise for their parish priest: in barely two months they had embroidered a cloth for the new altar with a design drawn by Julis Piris. To match this altar cloth that is still used on major feasts, over the past decades they have made *banners*, a *canopy* held over the priest carrying the Eucharist in processions, an *antependium* for the main altar, textiles for the side altars and cloths beneath the statues. The new litany also brought a change in the priest’s vestments. The women also embroidered vestments to meet the new requirements: chasubles, stoles, surplices and albs in colours corresponding to different times in the church year. These too were decorated with the colours and motifs of the “most recent style”. Together with *Julis Piris*, the design, drawing and working of these textiles was supervised by her daughter, *Mrs László Ivók née Julianna András*, and *Ilus Király’s* niece, *Veronika Zsubori*, a Kalocsa School Sister who serves as cantor in the church.<sup>13</sup> After the death in 1994 of Géza Antal, the priests and faithful of Eperföld parish preserved the tradition: over the course of the year embroidered Kalocsa flowers decorate the church’s altars and on major feasts also the priests’ vestments.

*Altar cloths, stoles, surplices, chasubles and banners* embroidered with Kalocsa motifs can be found in Roman Catholic churches throughout Hungary.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps there is not a single Roman Catholic church used by Hungarians living in the diaspora that does not have liturgical textiles decorated with Kalocsa embroidery. The motifs imagined, drawn and embroidered by simple religious women living in the scattered settlements around Kalocsa have become fully integrated into the stock of motifs of sacral art in Hungary. Besides Kalocsa embroidery, in recent decades other elements of the local embroidery culture have been introduced to liturgical textiles. Folk artists working today strive to continue and further

<sup>13</sup> Personal communication from Erzsébet M. Jolán Vancsura Kalocsa School Sister (†2014), a former associate of the Kalocsa-Eperföld parish and caretaker of the textiles.

<sup>14</sup> Pope John Paul II wore such a chasuble when he consecrated the Hungarian chapel in the crypt of Saint Peter’s basilica in Rome in 1980.

develop the tradition of their predecessors. Their efforts not only bring beauty to ordinary and feast day ceremonies, they also help to achieve one of the aims of the liturgical reform: *“With these actions it must be made manifest to Christ’s faithful that although they are not of this world, they are nevertheless the light of the world and they glorify the Father before the people.”*<sup>15</sup>

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Corporal and chalice veil in Kalocsa embroideries. In the collection of Károly Viski Museum, Kalocsa. (Photo by Ibolya Kerekes)



Chasuble with Kalocsa embroideries. In the collection of Károly Viski Museum, Kalocsa. (Photo by Ibolya Kerekes)





Surplice and chasuble. Used in the parish church Kalocsa-Eperföld.  
(Photo by Ibolya Kerekes)



You have in your hands the last yearbook of the MTA-SZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture. For five plus one years, that is, for six years we enjoyed the support of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

As we take our leave it is worth briefly recalling our research plans and the results achieved. Our research aim can be summed up as a comparative process analysis of the changes and renewal of 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> century Hungarian religious culture (Christian, Jewish, Muslim, neo-pagan), applying methods of cultural ethnology and anthropology. The 20<sup>th</sup> century was characterised first by the intertwining of the church and state institutional systems, then by their confrontation, and finally their separation, following the changing political and ideological regimes. Secular and religious values now coexist. The institutionalised churches and the practice of religion have fallen into the background, but the demand for spirituality has not. The role of religion is important, especially in creating the historical sense of identity, but it is not the sole factor in shaping values. An interdenominational dialogue has begun between the non-Christian religions present in our society and the traditional Christian denominations. The resulting integrational/disintegrational influence is not yet a source of social conflicts in Hungary (in the Carpathian Basin), in contrast with countries further to the west, although its influence is substantial.

The case studies in this volume clearly reflect the denominational attachment, as well as the methodological diversity and many-sided approach to religious phenomena.

Gábor Barna  
editor

